Identities and perceptions: gender, generation and ethnicity in the Italian Quarter, Birmingham, c1891 - 1938.

Carol Volante,
2001.

Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements

During the 1930s the Italian Quarter in Birmingham was cleared to allow slum demolition. The Italian population, including my father's family, dispersed into Birmingham's suburbs, leaving little evidence of the thriving community which had once lived there. I was not born until the Quarter was almost demolished, but among my earliest recollections are memories of Bastianelli's deli in New Canal Street where Italians gathered during the 1950s and 1960s to buy imported wines and food, and 'talk Italian'. In a back yard in Trent Street lived Mr and Mrs.Grego who gave me generous portions of their home-made ice-cream, and at the numerous re-unions held by the ex-inhabitants of the Quarter, I listened to reminiscences about what it was like living among the 'old' Italians. Although I never witnessed life in the Italian Quarter it was made very real to me by those who had. Yet despite the existence of the Quarter for over fifty years many people now living in Birmingham remain ignorant of the fact Italians lived in the city.

This research has been carried out, not only because the Italian Quarter might otherwise have been forgotten, but also because it provides a significant contribution to the history of Italians in Britain. This would not have been possible without the help given to me by the numerous Italians, who kindly allowed me to record their narratives and received me with great warmth and friendliness. To them I owe a huge thank you! I would also like to thank the following people for their help in providing me with information: Doreen Hopwood, genealogist at Birmingham Central Library; Dave Cross, curator of the Birmingham Police Museum; Dr. J.Sharp, curator of the Birmingham Archdiocesan Archive; and staff at the Birmingham Central Reference Library. I am also grateful to ex-colleagues at the University of Wolverhampton and to Doreen Hopwood who have provided moral and intellectual support. In addition, Lucio Sponza was kind enough to read and make some very helpful comments about Chapter 2, and Roger Leese and Carl Chinn have read the whole thesis and made valuable criticisms which helped me to clarify my arguments. A very special thank you is given to John Benson who has provided valuable guidance and offered pertinent advice throughout the whole of my research.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the support I have received from Tim and my family, and in particular my son Neil who has given me unfailing support and encouragement.

Abbreviations used in the footnotes of this thesis:

B'ham - Birmingham

PP - Parliamentary Papers

U.P - University Press

Tables

Chapter 1- METHODOLOGY

The study of immigrant communities in Britain has been among the most recent topics to be researched since the radical changes in historical interests and methodology in the late 1960s. However, embarking on a research project such as this, which examines social and economic aspects of Italians who lived in Birmingham during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, has emphasised the extent of neglect of the whole subject of the history of European immigration in Britain.[1]

The exclusion of these people from Britain's history is not the consequence of lack of opportunity, for numerous social and economic histories have been written in which European immigrants might have been included. Yet few historians have chosen to do so.[2] Instead, the ethnic population and its contributions to the development of Britain have been only fleetingly acknowledged. Their marginalisation from British mainstream history is difficult to understand, yet it could be justified on the grounds that the ethnic community is, and has always been, a comparatively small proportion of Britain's total population. Even so, if this is the reason it becomes difficult to square with the violent and passionate reactions their presence has evoked for at least the past one hundred years.[3]

Immigration trends in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century

Throughout history Europeans have migrated to Britain, and mostly in comparatively small numbers.[4] One of the most significant groups to do so were the

---

[1]The same cannot be claimed about the New Commonwealth immigrants who arrived after the World War II period, and who have received attention not only from historians, but most disciplines encompassed within the social sciences.

[2]For a pertinent discussion about the neglect of immigrant history by mainstream social and economic historians see: C. Holmes, "Historians and Immigration", in C.G. Pooley and I.D. Whyte (eds), *A Social History of Migration*, Routledge, 1991.

[3]Arnold White (ed), *The Destitute Alien in Great Britain*, 1892. Similar derisory opinions to those expressed by White about the perceived harmful influences of immigrants in Britain have continued to the present : Paul Johnson, "Begging is as old as history. But in Britain it is a problem that can only get worse... ", *The Mail*, 11.3.00.

[4]C. Holmes, *John Bull's Island. Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971*, Macmillan, 1988

Irish, who began to settle in Britain during the middle of the nineteenth century. From around the 1880s the number of immigrants in Britain probably rose more rapidly than it had previously. However, their exact numbers are unknown due to the inadequacies of the population census and immigration controls.[5] It was for a variety of reasons that, from around the 1880s, Europeans came to Britain to live, either temporarily or permanently. Some of these were refugees who sought a place of sanctuary, others were economic migrants in search of work and housing: many were both. At the end of the nineteenth century the majority of immigrants in Britain were Russian Jews, but within the migrant cohort there were also smaller migrations of people from countries throughout Europe.[6]

Migrants tended to converge on London and the largest industrial towns and ports such as Manchester and Liverpool, and it seems that only a minority found employment in rural areas.[7] By the end of the first two decades of the twentieth century immigration had slowed considerably in comparison with the late nineteenth century, largely as a result of British legislation and circumstances in Europe. (The details, jurisdiction and impact of British immigration laws will be discussed more fully

---

[5]The census for 1881 gave the figure of 56,373. In 1891 the number dropped to 34,895, but in 1901 the figure almost trebled to 91,678. The huge increase in the number of migrants further increased the doubts which census officials had held since at least 1891 about the inadequacies of enumeration and its ability to provide accurate population statistics: *1901 Census Abstract General Report,* p 181.

[6]The population of most of these European groups increased or remained static in England and Wales during the period 1891-1901. Until 1891 Germans comprised the largest group of all of the European immigrants, but by World War One German migration to Britain had ceased, partly because of the escalating animosity between Germany and Britain: P. Panayi, "Germans in Nineteenth Century Britain", *History Today,* Vol. 43, 1993, pp 44-53; C. Holmes, "Historians and Immigration", C. G. Pooley and I.D. Whyte (eds), p 192. The French were the fourth largest European immigrant group in England and Wales in 1901 with a population of 20,467 which had decreased slightly since 1891: 20,797. Belgians numbered around 4,000 in 1891 and 1901, but their numbers dramatically increased during World War One as a result of refugees, to around 20,000. The Swiss population in England and Wales increased from 6,617 in 1891 to 8,357 in 1901. Austrians in England and Wales more than doubled from 4,935 in 1891 to 9,685 in 1901: *Census, 1901,* Table XLVI, p 260.

[7]R.Dennis, *English Industrial Cities of the Nineteenth Century,* Cambridge, U.P., 1984, Table 2.3.

in chapters 4 and 6.) Immigration during the nineteenth century had a profound influence on attitudes in Britain, and was responsible for the introduction of restrictive legislation, the impact and legacy of which was evident well into the twentieth century.

European immigrant historiography

Despite the omission of early twentieth century immigration and immigrants from British histories, a limited number of investigations have been carried out by a comparatively small number of specialists, who have been evident since at least the middle of the nineteenth century. Most of these researchers, notwithstanding the notable exceptions of Colin Holmes and Panikos Panayi, have focused on individual immigrant groups.[8] Jewish historiography was one of the earliest to emerge,[9] and the sustained interest in the history of Jews in Britain has meant that more is known about that group than about any other European immigrants. Initial studies traced the development and settlement of Jewish communities and their business activities.[10] Since then topics have broadened to include investigations into ethnicity, anti-Semitism and Anglo-Jewry community interaction and relations.[11] More recently, regional studies have focused on specific aspects of identity, and language and its role in the process of inter-community relations.[12]

---

[8]For example: C. Holmes, *John Bull's Island*; C. Holmes (ed), *Immigrants and Minorities in Britain*, Allen and Unwin, 1978; P. Panayi, *Immigration, Ethnicity and Racism in Britain, 1815-1945*, Manchester, U.P., 1994.
[9]M. Margoliouth, *History of the Jews in Britain*, 1851.
[10]M. Freedman, *A Minority in Britain*, London, 1957; N. Bentwich, *The Jews in our Time*, Pelican, 1960; S. Aris, *The Jews in Business*, Harmondsworth, 1973.
[11]L.P. Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870-1914*, Manchester, 1983; J. A. Garrard, *The English and Immigration, 1880-1910*, Oxford, 1971; C. Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society, 1876-1939*, London, 1979; J. Buckman, *Immigrants and the class struggle: The Jewish immigrant in Leeds, 1880-1914*, Manchester, 1981.
[12]A. J. Kershen (ed), *The Promised land? The Migrant Experience in a Capital City*, Avebury, 1997; A. J. Kershen, "Mother Tongue as a Bridge to Assimilation?: Yiddish and Sylheti in East London", A.J. Kershen (ed), *Language, Labour and Migration*, Ashgate, 2000.

The study of the Irish in Britain followed a similar course to that of the Jews, and local histories, which appeared during the late 1970s and 80s, began with investigations into Irish populations in London,[13] York[14] and Liverpool[15]. More recently Irish historiography has moved away from research concerned with the settlement patterns of individual communities, types of employment, and the establishment of social, religious and political organisations, to reveal the diversity between local communities.[16]

Italian immigrant historiography

Following the transformation of British historical research, in the 1960s, when interests broadened and topics became less focused on elitist society, the history of Italians in Britain emerged. Initially research, which began in the 1970s, concentrated on a small number of local Italian communities: their migration, the impetus created by economic push and pull factors, and their settlement patterns.[17] These themes continued in the 1980s, in studies which expanded previous geographical and chronological limits.[18] Probably the most important of all of these investigations were

---

[13]L.H. Lees, *Exiles of Erin,* Manchester, 1979.
[14]F. Finnegan, *Poverty and Prejudice: A Study of Irish Immigrants in York, 1840-1945,* Cork, 1982.
[15]F. Neal, *Sectarian Violence: The Liverpool Experience, 1891-1914,* Manchester, 1988.
[16]R. Swift & J. Gilley, *The Irish in Victorian Britain: The Local Dimension,* Four Courts Press, 1999.
[17]A number of articles appeared in the *Association of Teachers of Italian Journal (ATI)* : T. Colpi, "The Italian Community in Glasgow with Special Reference to Spatial Development," *ATI*, Vol. 29. 1979; A. Wilkin, "Origins and Destinations of the Early Italio-Scots", *ATI*, Vol. 29, 1979; R. King, "Italian Migration to Great Britain", *Geography*, Vol. 62, 1977; R. Palmer, "The Italians: Patterns of Migration to London", J. Watson (ed), *Between Two Cultures,* Blackwell, 1977. The first study of migration from Italy was done much earlier than in the 1970s: R.F. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times*, New York, 1919.
[18]R. Palmer, *The Britalians: an anthropological investigation*, D.Phil, Sussex University, 1981; B.Bottignolo, *Without a Bell Tower: A Study of the Italian Immigrants in S.W. England,* Rome, 1985; A. Rae, *Manchester's Little Italy*, Richardson, 1988.

two studies by D.R. Green, who concentrated on Italians living in Holborn, London, and by Lucio Sponza who studied Italians nationally during the nineteenth and very early twentieth centuries.[19] Both researches revealed that three important phases had occurred in relation to population and employment trends.[20] Sponza further identified that alterations to the occupational structure and patterns of settlement, which occurred at the end of the nineteenth century, were related to the increasing number of Italian women coming to Britain. In addition to being one of only two scholars to have included information about Italian women in their studies, Sponza was the first to discuss the attitudes held by the British about Italian immigrants.[21] The number of researches continued to expand during the 1990s, and by the end of that decade two national studies and several local studies, which included Italian communities in Manchester, Newcastle, Bedford and Birmingham, were complete.[22]

These investigations have demonstrated that the number of Italians living in Britain gradually increased throughout the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth centuries. Approximately half of these Italians lived in London and the

---

[19]D.R. Green, "Little Italy in Victorian London: Holborn's Italian Community", *Camden History Review*, 15, 1988; L. Sponza, *Italian Immigrants in Nineteenth Century Britain: Realities and Images*, Leicester, 1988.

[20]The stages that have been identified in the development of occupations among Italians in Britain during the nineteenth century are, "... up to the 1870s, (itinerant street workers: street musicians and plaster statue makers and sellers, and craftsmen: precision instrument makers); from the late 1870s to the early 1890s, (itinerant work continued with unskilled occupations such as ice-cream manufacture and selling, and paviours and asphalters becoming more common, and a decline in the skilled occupations), and from the early 1890s onwards (fixed catering occupations: cafes, restaurants, ice-cream parlours and milk-bars): Sponza, *Realities and Images*, Ch 3.

[21]N. Di Blasio, "Italian Immigration to Britain: An Ignored Dimension", *ATI*, Vol. 28, 1979.

[22]H. Shankland, "Italians in Newcastle, 1800-1900: The Records of St. Andrew's R.C. Church", *Northern Catholic History*, Vol. 36, 1995; C. Semeraro Byram, *The Experiences of Italian Immigrants to Bedford in the 1950s and 1960s*, MA Thesis, Luton University, 1996; C. Chinn, "We all come from round Sora: Italians in B'ham, c1821-1919", O. Ashton, R. Fyson and S. Roberts (eds), *The Duty of Discontent. Essays for Dorothy Thompson*, Mansell, 1995; D. Hopwood and M. Dilloway, *Bella Brum: A History of B'ham's Italian Community*, B'ham, 1996; P. Di Felice, *The Italian Community in Manchester, 1880-1945: A study in Immigration, settlement, ethnicity and identity"*, Salford University, M.Phil, 1996.

remainder were scattered throughout Britain's larger towns and cities.[23] The settlements created by Italians are frequently referred to as 'communities', and this is a term which will also be used in this research.

Mindful of the varied and numerous definitions offered to describe a 'community', nevertheless the word will be used in this thesis in relation to the Italian Quarter in Birmingham.[24] The Quarter's inhabitants can be considered as being a community in the physical,[25] cultural[26] and symbolic[27] interpretations of the word. Not only did they have a common ancestry, live together in a particular geographical location and share similar cultural traits, but as this research will reveal, a proportion of St. Bartholomew Italians considered themselves as being part of a 'community' separate from Birmingham's population.

The establishment of numerous individual Italian communities in Britain was usually achieved through two methods: chain migration,[28] or the padrone system.[29]

---

[23]The larger communities in Britain were situated in London, see: R. Firth, "Kinship Organisation of Italianates in London", D. Garigue and R. Firth (eds), *Two Studies of Kinship in London*, London U. P, 1956; M.C.W. Wicks, *The Italian Exiles in London, 1816-1848*, Manchester U.P, 1937. Glasgow and Edinburgh: Colpi, "The Italian Community in Glasgow". Wales: A.C. Hughes, *The Italian Community in S. Wales, 1870-1945*, M.Phil, Cardiff University, 1988. Ireland: B. Reynolds, *Casalattico and the Italian Community in Ireland*, UCD Foundation for Italian Studies, 1993.

[24]G. Hillery discovered ninety-four different definitions of 'community' whose only common feature was that they "all dealt with people": G. Hillery, "Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement," *Rural Sociology*, Vol. 20, 1955, p 116-131.

[25]People living and working together in one geographical territory: D. Minar and S. Greer, *The Concept of Community*, Aldine, 1969.

[26]F. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Little Brown, 1969.

[27]Imaginary geographical boundaries are constructed by a group of people who see themselves as a group distinctive from others around them: A.P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, Tavistock, 1985.

[28]Chain migration occurs when pioneer migrants assist people from their home area to migrate by providing information about, and/or accommodation and employment in the receiving country: D. Baines, *Emigration from Europe, 1815-1930*, Cambridge U.P, 1995, p 29.

[29]A padrone was an employer who brought over boys from Italy and provided them with musical instruments and board and lodging in return for the money they collected on the streets: Sponza, *Realities and Images*, p 68; Colpi, *The Italian Factor*, p 34; Green, "Little Italy in Victorian London", p 14.

In both types of migration Italians probably originated from similar regions in Italy prior to settling in Britain. Once here they tended not to disperse throughout a particular town or city, but instead they remained together, occupying consecutive houses, whole courtyards or streets, more often for upward of one generation.[30] This pattern of settlement meant that Italian communities not only comprised compatriots, but also kin and therefore people who shared regional cultural traits. These common features held by Italian communities in Britain are believed to have culminated in the long-term effect of sustaining their ethnic group identity and relative isolation.

Ethnic Group Identity

Much of the research about Italians in Britain has created the impression that communities had a strong ethnic group identity which was encouraged and maintained in two ways. First, through national and local social organisations and clubs,[31] which have been suggested by Colpi to "have all had a great influence on preserving the stability and distinctiveness of British Italian Communities",[32] and the second influence is believed to have been the "community spirit" or "campanilismo".[33] The latter of these influences is claimed to have emanated from Italian regional origins and to have been given impetus through the socio-economic structure of their communities in Britain. Researchers also infer that ethnic group identity was not only crucial during the formation period of Italian communities in Britain, but throughout subsequent generations and instrumental in their tendency not to disperse. In short, research has

---

[30]In Glasgow and Edinburgh Italians tended to live in one area of the city and establish businesses in another: Colpi, *Italian Factor*, p 76.
[31]For discussions about the role and importance of Italian clubs and societies see: Colpi, *Italian Factor*; Sponza, *Realities and Images*; Palmer, *The Britalians*.
[32]Colpi, *Italian Factor*, p 16.
[33]"When migrants moved abroad this sense of campanilismo (local loyalties) was transported with them where, if anything, it became even stronger as a social force": Colpi, *Italian Factor*, p 53.

promoted the impression that Italian communities were multi-generational and that all inhabitants shared a similar strong ethnic identity.

Evidence of the existence of an ethnic group identity within Italian immigrant communities has been based on socio-economic determinants, similar to those endorsed by P. Panayi. Panayi defines ethnicity as, "the way in which members of a national, racial or religious grouping maintain an identity with people of the same background in a variety of official and unofficial ways", for example, through close residential dispersal, endogamy and shared religious and social activities.[34]

Elsewhere investigations have identified the purpose and manifestation of ethnicity. O. Handlin's research in America demonstrated how practices such as those defined by Panayi helped migrants to recreate their homeland and forge a common identity which acted to soften the impact of the culture shock they experienced.[35] More recently W.J. Fishman's study of Jews and Irish in the East End of London, confirmed similar behaviour.[36]

National and local research has demonstrated that some or all of the traits identified by Panayi, Handlin and Fishman occurred within Italian communities in Britain. However, unlike elsewhere, Italian research has rarely investigated the role of ethnicity or its importance to all, or even the majority of Italians within these multi-generational communities. Instead it has been presumed that an ethnic identity was valued and practised by every generation of Italian settlers. However, this may not necessarily have been so, for although the bonds of ethnic identity might be strong and deliberately retained among first generation immigrants who established their communities, allegiance to 'homeland traditions' and the need for an ethnic identity

---

[34]P. Panayi, *Immigrants, Ethnicity and Racism in Britain,* Manchester, U.P, 1994, p 5.
[35]O. Handlin, "Immigration in American Life: A Reappraisal", H.S. Commager (ed), *Immigration and American History,* Minesota U.P, 1960, p 19.
[36]W.J.Fishman, "Allies in the Promised Land: Reflections on the Irish and the Jews in the East End", A.J. Kershen (ed), *The Promised Land? The Migrant Experience in a Capital City,* Avebury, 1997, p 44 .

would have almost certainly declined among subsequent generations, who were born, educated and socialised in their grandparents' and parents' adoptive country.

The conclusion that the group identity developed by the first generation of Italian settlers was pursued with equal vigour by their descendants, has been reached on limited evidence largely devoid of research about women and children, familial and social organisation within Italian communities. Indeed, so fleeting have studies about identity and generational changes been that it would be easy to overlook the presence of any evidence about these aspects of Italian community life.[37] Furthermore, the related issues of fluidity, dilution and periodic changes, that have been recognised as being important in community studies elsewhere, have also been neglected in Italian research.[38]

---

[37]King, "Italian Migration to G. Britain", p 105. For a discussion on the topic of identity in general: S. Allen, "Race, Ethnicity and Nationality: Some Questions of Identity", H. Afshar and M. Maynard (eds), *The Dynamics of Race and Gender. Some Feminist Interventions,* Taylor and Francis, 1994.

[38]Paul Di Felice's has investigated the role and change in community identity and although alteration was evident, no evidence of 'crisis' was reported: Di Felice, "Italians in Manchester". R. King briefly mentions that there may have been "possible conflicts": R. King and L. Zolli, "Italians in Leicester", *ATI,* Vol. 33, 1981, p 10. The reasons for and extent of alteration of identity continue to be debated, as does the level of friction within immigrant communities created by generational and identity changes. J.K. Puar does not agree that conflict will automatically occur within immigrant communities as a consequence of cultural change, and argues that opinions and assumptions which espouse the 'natural' occurrence of identity crises are ethnocentric. Puar points out that conflict exists in all cultures between generations largely as a result of the generation gap and furthermore, that second generation immigrant women will not automatically become, " 'victims' caught between two cultures": J.K. Puar, "Revisiting Discourses of 'Whiteness' and 'Asianness' in N. England: Second Generation Sikh Women and Construction of Identity", M. Maynard and J. Purvis (eds), *New Frontiers in Women's Studies: Knowledge, Identity and Nationalism,* Taylor and Francis, 1996, p 131. For a discussion about the identity crisis experienced by second and third generation immigrants see: R. & C. Ballard, "The Sikhs: The Development of Asian Settlements in Britain", J. Watson (ed), *Between Two Cultures: Immigrants and Minorities in Britain,* Blackwell, 1977; P. Weinrich claims an identity crisis occurs in migrant communities as a result of "dual socialisation": P. Weinrich, "Cross Ethnic Identification and Self-Rejection in a Black Adolescent", G.J. Verma and C. Bayley (eds), *Race, Education and Identity*, London, 1979, p 303. On changing women's identity see for example: S. Alexander, *Becoming A Woman and Other Essays in Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries Feminist History,*

The isolation of Italian Communities

Another aspect of Italian immigrant life in Britain was their tendency to settle and remain in relatively isolated communities. Some of these ethnic enclaves became known locally as "Little Italy" or the "Italian Quarter".[39] Indeed, some writers have emphasised how Italians consciously sought a distinctiveness which set them apart from the indigenous population and this behaviour aided their group identity.[40]

Elsewhere, studies have shown that the formation and development of a group identity is influenced by a complex combination of cultural, social and economic factors, which can be generated both internally or extraneously.[41] However, the behaviour and isolation of Italian communities has been interpreted in Italian immigrant research as a deliberate and voluntary response emanating solely from within the community in order to resist acculturation. To date Italian research has left unexplored the reasons why such a strong ethnic group identity existed, why isolationism occurred and no consideration has been given to the possibility that

---

Virago, 1994; C. Boyce-Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations on the Subject*, Routledge, 1984.

[39]Small communities of Italians were located in Holborn (Little Italy), London: Green, "Little Italy", p 2; Ancoats (Little Italy), Manchester: P. Di Felice, "Manchester's Little Italy", *Manchester Region History Review*, Vol. 12, 1998; the Dock area, Liverpool; Nalgo Place, Newcastle: Colpi, *Italian Factor*, p 75-6; St. Bartholomew's ward (Italian Quarter), B'ham: Hopwood and Dilloway, *Bella Brum*.

[40]Colpi, *Italian Factor*, p 86; Sponza, *Realities and Images*, p 51; King, *Italian Migration to G.Britain*, p 185; Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, p 52; Di Felice, "Italians in Manchester", p 103. Another reason offered for the isolation of their communities is that in the first instance Italians maintained strong links with Italy and "retained an independent character (whilst) remaining aloof from the host society and its institutions" and that this behaviour resulted in "the suspicion and annoyance" of the host society: Sponza, *Images and Realities*, p 51.

[41]The reaction towards a community which withdraws from the wider society, in conjunction with an emphasis placed on their ethnicity, "may become an increasingly important line of cleavage in society..." since it is often interpreted by the host society as antagonistic: E. Cashmore (ed), *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations*, London, 1996, p 124. The suggestion has been made that the more "visible" the ethnicity, as in the example of language, the more threatening it is perceived to be to the host society: G.D. Suttles, *The Social Order of the Slum, Ethnicity and Territory in the Inner City*, Chicago U.P, 1968, p 63. See also Puar, "Revisiting Discourses of 'Whiteness' and 'Asianness'", p 139.

extraneous forces may have been significant or influential in the relatively slow dispersal and integration of Italians in Britain.[42]

Whilst the current explanations of why Italian communities remained together and maintained a strong ethnic group identity are valid, it is also plausible that their attempts to resist acculturation, retain independence, and prolong a strong ethnic identity, indicate that their communities were sustained to provide protection. Conclusions drawn about the formation and development of isolated communities have not always agreed with those forwarded by Italian researches. Indeed, several social scientists have suggested that such community behaviour might be the reaction of a group which has been marginalised.[43]

J.M. Yinger argues that ethnic groups exist only when a segment of a larger society is seen by others to be characteristically different in terms of its: "language, religion, race and ancestral homeland with its related culture; the members also perceive themselves in that way; and they share activities built around their (real or mythical) common culture".[44] Those who are treated and perceived as 'different' are motivated to act against their marginalisation by emphasising their ethnicity in order to provide a sense of empowerment. Thus, Yinger believes the pursuit of ethnicity is not necessarily a voluntary response, but one forced on a group who see themselves, and who are believed, to be separate from the society in which they live.

---

[42]Various criteria of integration will be studied throughout this thesis, including the extent to which the St. Bartholomew Italians were permitted to, and participated in, local employment, their membership of local Italianate and non-Italianate formal and informal social activities, religious and educational institutions and endogamy.

[43]E. Cashmore (ed), *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations,* p 124. On the topic of ethnic identity and empowerment: B.S. Phillips, *Sociology: Social Structure and Change"*, Macmillan, 1969, p 47.

[44]Yinger does not accept the view that ethnic groups are necessarily discriminated against because they are seen to be different: J.M. Yinger, "Intersection Strands in the theorisation of race and ethnic relations", J. Rex and D. Mason (eds), *Theories of Race and Ethnic Relations,* Cambridge U.P, 1986, p 22.

Although the isolationist tendencies of Italian communities have been recognised, the majority of past research has side-stepped the issue of marginalisation, and has promoted the idea that Italian immigrants were popular in Britain. This opinion seems to have been based primarily on the success of the Italian catering industry,[45] and on the fact there are few publicised instances of widespread, consistent racism or racist violence against Italians.[46] However, these conclusions should be treated with some scepticism. The success of the Italian catering industry illustrates ingenuity and the ability to develop a desirable commodity for the British consumer, but it does not necessarily reflect the level of Italian popularity in Britain. Nor is the absence of publicised hostility or racism against Italians a reliable barometer of their acceptance by society.

Publicised widespread racist activity was relatively rare in Britain before World War Two, but this is not to say racism was not prevalent. Furthermore, racism takes

---

[45]Di Felice, *Italian Community in Manchester*, p 62; Elizabeth Williams, unpublished paper. Newcastle upon Tyne, Nov. 1995.

[46]Other than during World War II and at the end of the nineteenth century, public opinion about Italians has not been researched. The degree to which it is acknowledged that Italian immigrants were likely to be discriminated against varies. Most writers display an optimistic interpretation of the levels of acceptance of Italians. King claims that, "Italians are clearly amongst the 'aristocrats' of British immigrants": R. King, "Italians in Britain: An Idiosyncratic Immigration", *ATI*, Vol. 29, 1979, p 11. Palmer dismisses the hostility towards Italians recorded by R. Firth, as being the result of research carried out soon after World War II: Palmer, *The Britalians*. Colpi acknowledges that discrimination/hostility towards Italians during World War II existed but reasons that this attitude was uncharacteristic: Colpi, *Italian Factor*. Hughes argues, "Italians were seen as honest and friendly; they posed no threat; their services were enjoyed," despite the fact that earlier in his thesis he described how the hostility which Welsh miners showed towards Italian workers resulted in Italians abandoning their jobs and returning to Italy: A.C. Hughes, *The Italian Community in S. Wales*, p 138. Whilst not denying that discrimination occurred in the nineteenth century, Sponza tends to explain it as being part of the general anti-alien attitude of the period: Sponza, *Realities and Images*. B. Sereni accepts marginalisation occurred and suggests it was caused by religion which, "in many ways isolated and kept (Italians) on the fringe of all social activities": B. Sereni, *They Took the Low Road*, Barga, 1974, p 15. Tullio openly acknowledges the role of the extended family was to protect each other from external threats and the reason why Italians stay together: P. Tullio, *North of Naples, South of Rome*, Lilliput, 1994, p 115.

numerous forms. P. Panayi has identified at least eight different types of racism, "which divide into official and unofficial". He also suggests the more usual method of hostility and racial discrimination is, "refusal to enter into social or economic intercourse" which is very difficult to detect.[47] In addition, racism may not be explicit. Colin Holmes and Ken Lunn have pointed out that anti-immigrant feeling tends to "ebb and flow", without there necessarily being obvious reasons why such attitudes occur.[48] Both writers acknowledge that the late Victorian and Edwardian periods witnessed intense xenophobia, anti-immigrant and anti-immigration feelings in Britain. Furthermore, racist opinions were promoted through campaigns which received national and local publicity. Therefore, in order fully to understand the reasons why Italian communities remained together in relative isolation it would be prudent to look beyond superficial indicators, such as ethnicity, and to examine closely their relations with the society in which they lived.

The development of 'Italianate' occupations[49]

In addition to topics relating to the promotion of ethnicity, the settlement of migrants and the communities they formed, a recurrent theme in the study of Italians in Britain has been work. Indeed, the vast majority of studies have focused on the types of work done by Italian males and their employment within Italianate catering occupations, such as the ice-cream trade and cafe and restaurant proprietorship. However, among some scholars the development of ethnic trades has been interpreted as an attempt to raise group identity and elevate a subordinate group within a society.

---

[47]P.Panayi (ed), *Racial Violence in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries*, London U.P, 1996, p 3.
[48]C. Holmes, *A Tolerant Country? Immigrants, Refugees and Minorities in Britain*, Faber and Faber, 1991, p 102; K. Lunn, "Immigrants and British Labours' Response, 1870-1950", *History Today*, Vol. 35, Nov. 1985, p 48.
[49]The word 'Italianate' has been adopted from its Elizabethan meaning, as something of Italian character, form or origin: Firth, "Kinship Organisation of Italianates in London", p 67.

This, R. A. Williams argues, tends to occur when a group does not integrate or if they are marginalised.[50]

Sponza's research demonstrated that the majority of Italians who migrated to Britain at the end of the nineteenth century arrived in a poor economic state. Many originated from agricultural regions of Italy and probably could not speak English, and did not possess industrial skills. Other writers have stressed the prevalence of self-employment, and even entrepreneurialism, among Italians.[51] This focus has promoted the idea that economic stability was attained relatively rapidly after their arrival in Britain and that self-employment was indicative of their upward socio-economic mobility. However, the extent to which self-employment can be considered as an achievement is arguable.[52] It is more widely recognised that economic stability and upward mobility are difficult to achieve, and given the initial poor circumstances in which most Italians arrived in Britain it is not unreasonable to suppose they would have experienced some difficulties. A. Godley's study of East End Jews demonstrated the problems poor immigrants experienced. He suggests that lacking appropriate cultural and industrial skills, immigrants would have struggled to attain upward socio-economic mobility and this resulted in "ethnic minorities ...(being) trapped at the

---

[50]R.A. Williams (Jnr), "Competing Models of Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Cultural Societies: An Appraisal of Possibilities", J.M. Yinger and S.J. Cutler (eds), *Major Sociological Issues. A Multi-disciplinary View*, New York, 1978.

[51] Palmer claims that Italian, "self-made men ... (were) in considerable numbers over the last 100 years or so": Palmer, *The Britalians*, p 90. Colpi states, "(A)lmost entirely self-employed and working in small service businesses, the Italians were unaffected by unemployment during the depression years, and most not only survived but prospered despite the economic difficulties round them". Colpi has referred to the 1920s and 1930 as the "Golden Age" for Italian immigrants in Britain: Colpi, *Italian Factor*, pp 71 and 82. See also, P. Di Felice, "Italians in Manchester, 1891-1939: settlement and occupations", *Local Historian*, Vol. 30, No 2, May, 2000.

[52]A study of Italians in America has demonstrated how upward social mobility was unlikely in the lifetime of first generation immigrants and that mobility was more likely to have been, "horizontal rather than vertical, or no mobility at all": J. Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in urban America*, Indiana U. P, 1987, p 171.

periphery of the labour market ... (and) ... with access denied to highly paid jobs outside the area of primary settlement, immigrants had little incentive to leave".[53]

Whilst it is good to emphasise Italian achievement some caution should be exercised about accepting their economic accomplishments as common.[54] The focus of Italian research on the successful self-employed and entrepreneurs could be dangerously misleading and may disguise other economic circumstances within Italian communities. Although it is plausible that some Italians prospered, it is likely that greater numbers did not, and may even have struggled against poverty. Past research has demonstrated that limited employment opportunities, created by the lack of appropriate industrial and language skills, kept people poor and prevented their relocation away from primary settlement areas. From necessity the poor were encouraged to form community survival networks, which E. Krausz argues were a key function of immigrant communities and acted to provide mutual aid.[55] However, whilst such self-help was crucial to the survival of some people it might also have helped to restrict their relocation, for as E. Ross suggests, mutual aid "also impedes social or geographical mobility, for it makes it difficult, if not impossible, to accumulate ... cash."[56] Therefore, due to the limitations imposed through economic circumstances, it is plausible that some immigrant communities remained intact for generations.[57]

---

[53]A. Godley, "Leaving the East End: Regional Mobility among East European Jews in London, 1880-1914", Kershen (ed), *The Promised Land?*, p 53.
[54]With the exception of Lucio Sponza's extensive research into the Italian poor in London, poverty within Italian communities has hardly been explored
[55]E.Krausz, *Ethnic Minorities in Britain*, Paladin, 1972, p 71.
[56]E. Ross, "Survival Networks: Women's Neighbourhood Sharing in London before World War One," *History Workshop*, Vol. 15, 1985, p 18.
[57]The importance of internal community economic support has also been confirmed in studies about British working class neighbourhoods: J. Benson, *Working Class in Britain, 1850-1939*, Longman, 1989, p 126. For similar findings see: J. Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960*, Routledge, 1994;D.R. Green and A. G. Parson, "Slums and Slum Life in Victorian England: London and B'ham at mid-century", S.M. Gaskell (ed), *Slums*, Leicester U.P, 1990.

The tendency of past research to concentrate on the economically successful Italian entrepreneur, and to overlook the less affluent members of society, was possibly the result of efforts to improve the status of Italian immigrants in Britain during a period when race relations had a high profile.[58] However, it could be argued that because of the stance taken by earlier researchers our understanding of Italian immigrant life in Britain may have been warped. By emphasising only those Italians who became prosperous, research has neglected the more common socio-economic circumstances. Thus our knowledge about the internal economic dynamics of Italian communities, in relation to the roles of men, women and children, material conditions and financial support is sparse. Furthermore, as Colin Holmes points out, there are many aspects of "the inner life of the Italian community" which remain unknown, and there has been very little investigation into "the changes which resulted from its various contacts with British society".[59]

Inter-community relations

With few exceptions scant interest has been shown by scholars in exploring the relations between Italian immigrant communities and the host society, and where this has been done research is chronologically and geographically limited.[60] The overall effect is that knowledge about Italian communities is introverted and one-dimensional.

Recently the study of inter-community relations and integration has received criticism. Deemed as inevitably ethnocentric and subjective, it has been argued that such research is based on the premise of one's own cultural superiority and the assumption that immigrants would *naturally* want to forfeit their native culture in order to become part of the wider society.[61] It is true that some past research has had

---

[58]Many studies of Italian immigration occurred when issues concerning New Commonwealth immigration had a high historical and sociological profile among researchers.
[59] Holmes (ed), *Immigrants and Minorities*, p 19.
[60]Sponza studied the perceptions held about Italians in London during the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth century: Sponza, *Realities and Images*.
[61]M. Maynard and J. Purvis (eds) , *New Frontiers in Women's Studies: Knowledge,*

this tendency and such criticism is fair. Nevertheless, integration studies are crucial to the better understanding of society as a whole and need not take an ethnocentric approach. Investigations which consider both the immigrant and host communities in conjunction and contemporaneously, will provide valuable insight into intra- and inter-community functions which, in turn, will help to bring about a better understanding of their responses to each other. Immigrant history studies should therefore examine the whole community in relation to the cause and consequence of behaviour, rather than focus on the salient differences between societies as has been the practice of much research into New Commonwealth immigrant communities in recent times.

This thesis will provide an explanation of why Italian communities remained together and were slow to disperse, and in so doing it will broaden the scope and chronology of current knowledge about Italian immigrants in Britain. An examination of the Italian Quarter in Birmingham c1891-1938 will be carried out in relation to the internal and extraneous cultural, social and economic factors which may have influenced the sustainment of that community. The investigation will explore generational changes and continuities, gender roles and the extent and type of identities within the Italian Quarter throughout the period. In order to do this, three key elements will form the focus of this study: work; community, family and neighbourhood and local perceptions held by the host society both about the St. Bartholomew Italians, and the Italian Quarter where they lived. Before beginning the discussion about the evidence used in this thesis a brief socio-economic history of Birmingham during the period will be provided, which will be followed by explanations of the terms and phrases which are being used.

Socio-economic profile of Birmingham during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

Birmingham's economic growth and wealth during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries resulted from the metal manufacturing industry which developed there and

---

Identity and Nationalism, Taylor and Francis, 1996.

produced a variety of goods. In addition to large machinery, guns, buttons, smaller 'toy' metal items, such as screws, badges, pens and pins were among those manufactured by Birmingham's industries.[62] Unlike some other industrial towns and cities during the nineteenth century (such as Manchester), Birmingham's industry was not dominated by large factories.[63] Far more common were small and medium sized workshops, distributed throughout the central areas of Birmingham, interspersed between houses and situated in gardens. Each master employed a small number of skilled men in their workshops, and they often worked alongside their employees.

The effect of these working practices has long been debated and remains unresolved by historians.[64] However, what can be deduced is that the close working proximity of employees, who often comprised fathers and sons, probably engendered customs which favoured the employment of men known to the master. If so,

---

[62]C. Chinn, *B'ham: The Great Working City*, B'ham, 1994, p 43.

[63]E.Hopkins, "Working Hours and conditions during the Industrial Revolution", *Economic History Review*, Vol. 35, 1982, p 55.

[64]There are currently two schools of thought about the influence of the small and medium sized workshops in B'ham. Whilst each school acknowledges that small workshops were common in B'ham at the beginning of the nineteenth century, their influence on working relations between masters and men remains unresolved. E. Hopkins argues that, "B'ham employers knew their men", which led to relatively good working relations: E. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town: B'ham and the Industrial Revolution*, Sutton, 1998, p 180. He further states that local paternalism was strong in B'ham and led to "relatively good labour relations": Hopkins, "Working Hours and conditions during the Industrial Revolution", p 53. Also sharing this opinion are S. and B. Webb, *The History of Trades Unions*, 1920; D.J. Rowe, "Class and political radicalism in London, 1831-2", *Historical Journal*, Vol. 13, 1, 1970. Carl Chinn believes that the influence of Trades Unions in B'ham was not strong, due to the large number of unrepresented female and child labour, which undermined industrial action from the workers. (Correspondence between the writer and Carl Chinn.) However, others argue the opposite view: that trade disputes did occur in B'ham and that working relations were not necessarily improved by the working conditions in small and medium sized workshops. C. Behagg states that, "The increasing scale of internal organisation that they (trades societies) represented served to consolidate collective behaviour within occupational groupings and on one level this certainly emphasised the sense of identity within individual trades. But ... changing in the second quarter of the nineteenth century (were the) societies (who) ... redefine(d) their relationships, not only with the employers but also with other trades": C. Behagg, "Custom, class and change: the trade societies of B'ham", *Social History*, 1979, p 480.

restrictions would have been imposed against prospective employees from outside the community who tried to find work in Birmingham. There was a further and long term effect of Birmingham's industries being concentrated in small and medium sized workshops, confined to the metal industries. Not only did metalwork-related industries in the city lead to a predominance of that type of craft and craftsmen, but it also excluded others. A. Briggs has pointed out that as a result of the limited number of crafts professionals and tertiary sector industries, including entertainment, restaurants, hotels and cafes were less apparent in Birmingham than elsewhere in Britain.[65]

Employed within the numerous workshops in Birmingham were many highly skilled workmen. Their skills provided them with relatively high wages, which allowed them to occupy properties of a higher rent than was common among skilled workers elsewhere.[66] By the middle of the nineteenth century wealthier skilled workers and the middle class had already begun to vacate the centre of Birmingham to live in the newer suburbs. Skilled workers moved to areas such as Saltley and the middle class to Egbaston, an area C. Hall describes as, "planned with restrictive leases that prevented the building of workshops in gardens or the opening of shops on the premises".[67] The exodus of the wealthier families from the centre of Birmingham changed the balance in population between the centre and the periphery and the poor were left to inhabit the overcrowded slum areas of the inner city wards.[68]

Although there were some living in the slum districts in the centre of Birmingham whose lifestyle determined their settlement there,[69] others were forced to

---

[65]A. Briggs, *History of B'ham, Vol. II, 1865-1938*, London, 1952, p 324.
[66]*Ibid.* p 115.
[67]C. Hall, "The butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker: the shop and family in the Industrial Revolution", R.J. Morris and R. Rodger (eds), *The Victorian City, 1820-1914*, Longman, 1993, p 311.
[68]Briggs, *History of B'ham*, p 318.
[69]In 1904 the Medical Officer of Health condemned the skilled workers who remained in the city centre as living there only because they were poor managers of their incomes. It was claimed in the report that the poverty experienced by the skilled workers living in the St. Bartholomew area was the consequence of gambling and

live in the city centre, either because housing was unavailable elsewhere or they were too poor to afford the higher rents in the suburbs.[70] A large proportion of male workers living in the central wards of Birmingham were labourers, unskilled or street workers, and their wives and children worked as outworkers in the button and pin industries or as sorters and packers.[71] All of these types of work were irregular or low paid and probably allowed employees to rent only the cheapest and poorest accommodation available.

However, there was much wealth in Birmingham throughout the period, and some of the poor were helped by the various charities organised by the middle class.[72] Of course, not all of Birmingham's poor were treated sympathetically, and throughout the period reservations were held by numerous social investigators that not all of the poor deserved their financial help.[73] Some of the middle class resented what they considered were the excesses of the working class and their wastefulness.[74] Among these were influential businessmen and town councillors who believed the eradication of all outward signs of poverty from Birmingham's streets would be in their own and the city's best interests. Thus, from the middle of the nineteenth century there was a

---

drinking, or spending their income on "other unnecessary expenditure". *MOH, 1904,* p 16.

[70]*City of B'ham Special Housing Enquiry, 1913-4,* p 16-7.

[71]M.O. Health Report, Special Report on the Floodgate Street Area, 1904, p 14.

[72]During the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries numerous charity organisations existed concerned with helping various sectors of the poor. For example, in the St. Bartholomew's ward alone there were forty charity organisations and clubs aimed at improving life for juveniles living in the area. *B'ham Juvenile Organisations Committee, First Report,* March, 1925, p 67-70.

[73]For example, middle-class women organised Ladies' Associations and worked with working-class women to try to eradicate prostitution. Their efforts have been described as a "mixture of humanitarianism and class domination": P. Bartley, *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914,* Routledge, 2000, p 75. See also criticisms made by other middle-class observers: *Child Welfare in 1913. Report to the Chairman and members of the Public Health and Housing Committee,* p 3.

[74]For example, the Special Housing Report of 1913-4 categorised the poor into the "deserving" and "undeserving" based on the ability of the poor to manage their income in accordance with the standards set by the report's investigators. *City of B'ham Special Housing Enquiry, 1913-4,* p 31-2.

campaign against street traders and others who were considered as undesirables. Various local government laws were introduced to clear the streets of 'vagrants' and as a result street vendors were fined for cluttering the streets. Attempts were also made to reduce the amount of street noise, particularly in the high class shopping areas of the city centre and wealthier residential areas. (See Chapter 2) Furthermore, rate payers objected to the introduction of house building programmes and schemes were repeatedly postponed during the late nineteenth century in favour of civic building, which would emphasise the wealth of Birmingham and encourage future business. Although some slum houses were demolished in the city centre, they were not replaced with new ones. This exacerbated the housing shortage and created further overcrowding in the poorer districts, as the evicted sought cheap accommodation.[75]

In common with many other towns in Britain at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Birmingham's population rapidly increased as a result of migrating people in search of work.[76] The city's population continued to grow steadily and its distribution throughout several wards is shown in Table 1, for the period 1895-1931. The wards selected for inclusion in the table have been chosen to illustrate population trends in central areas of the city, as well as provide a comparison between those areas and the less centrally located wards of Saltley and Edgbaston and Harborne.

---

[75]For example in Colmore Row an impressive selection of civil buildings replaced housing although tenants were not rehoused after the demolition of their homes. B'ham seems to have behaved in a similar way to other local authorities at the end of the nineteenth century. J. Burnett states that local authorities were, "very reluctant to enter the field of property owning when the whole expense had to be borne from the rates": J. Burnett, *A Social History of Housing, 1915-1970,* David & Charles, 1978, p 18. J.S. Nettlefold, the Chairman of B'ham's Housing Committee, was of the opinion that repair and renovation of slum houses was preferential to rebuilding: C. Chinn, *Homes for People: One Hundred Years of Council House Building in Birmingham,* Wheaton, 1991, p 100.

[76]E. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town: B'ham and the Industrial Revolution,* Sutton, 1998, p 119.

Table 1. The Population of Birmingham and Selected Wards, 1895-1931

WARDS	1895	1900	1905	1910	1921	1931
St.Bartholomew's	26622	27100	24762	22303	39804	35018
Nechells & Duddeston	55975	60300	56232	53990	42463	38592
St.Martin's & Deritend	52381	51900	48385	44604	44990	39309
Market Hall	13096	12400	9049	8409	18982	19712
Saltley	27892	41600	47318	61043	31624	39930
Edgbaston & *Harborne	29591	32500	31002	34699	35625	35539
Birmingham TOTAL	496751	519610	542959	570113	922167	1002603

*In 1911 ward changes separated Edgbaston and Harborne.[77]

In 1911, and currently, Birmingham comprised thirty-seven wards (see map B). The ward of St. Bartholomew's lay in the middle of the city, surrounded by St. Mary's, St. Paul's, St. Martin's and Deritend, Duddeston and Nechells and Market Hall. Lying outside these central wards was the lower middle-class suburb of Saltley, inhabited largely by skilled workers and their families, and the suburb of Edgbaston which housed wealthy manufacturers and entrepreneurs.

Identification of population changes within the city is difficult, due primarily to the boundary changes that accompanied the expansion of Birmingham in 1911, and the elusiveness of statistics for the period surrounding World War One.[78] Nevertheless, Table 1 clearly indicates two trends during the period: first, although the population fluctuated, overall it increased, and more than doubled. Second, there was an uneven population distribution in Birmingham, and between 1895 and 1911 no fewer than 22.7% of the total number of residents lived in the central wards.

---

[77]Calculated from *MOH Reports, 1895, 1900,1905, 1910* and the *Census*, 1931.
[78]In part the population growth during this period was due to realignment of B'ham's boundary which increased its overall size in 1911. *Census, 1901-1931.*

Table 2. The Population Density of selected Birmingham Wards, 1912.[79]

WARD	Av. Population per acre	Size of Ward acres
St. Martin's & Deritend	96	410
Duddeston & Nechells	76.5	570
St. Bartholomew's	71.5	517
Saltley	21.3	1585
Edgbaston	12.6	2657

Table 2 shows the number of people living in selected Birmingham wards and, as would be expected for that period, indicates that the population was more concentrated in the centre of the city than it was in the outer wards of Saltley and Edgbaston. The table also demonstrates that the wards of St. Martin's and Deritend, Duddeston and Nechells and St. Bartholomew's were substantially smaller in size than the other two. In 1912, St. Bartholomew's had the third highest population density of all of the central wards shown in Table 2. Even so, although these figures are high, the extent of overcrowding there is masked, since they do not reveal the large proportion of industrially occupied land in the ward. The figure of 71.5 people per acre (as shown on table 2) is misleading and disguises the pockets of congestion found in the ward.[80] It should also be noted that the figures used in Table 2 were for 1912, a year when the number of people living in the ward was lower than at any other time shown in Table 1.

The high population density in St. Bartholomew's ward was in part due to the number of common lodging houses which were established in the area from early in the nineteenth century,[81] and to the multiple families sharing houses.[82] A significant

---

[79]*MOH, 1912*, p154.
[80]C.A. Vince, *History of the Corporation of Birmingham, 1900-15*, 1923, p 155.
[81]*The Report on the Health and Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain, 1842* describes the conditions of the common lodging houses found in the area, and in 1904 twenty lodging houses were reported to have been located in the area, having a total of 629 inhabitants: *MOH, 1904*, p 16.
[82]Vince, *History of the Corporation of Birmingham, 1900-15*, p 155.

proportion of the accommodation in the St. Bartholomew's ward comprised back-to-back houses located in courtyards, many of which had long been regarded as slums, although very little demolition was carried out before 1930.[83] The housing and living conditions in St. Bartholomew's meant, of course, that inhabitants experienced a very different life-style from those living in Saltley or Edgbaston. In the latter wards the inhabitants not only lived in an area of low population density, but also had the advantage of there being more parks and recreational areas: amenities less likely in the industrialised central areas of Birmingham.

In the ward adjacent to St. Bartholomew's, were St. Martin's and the Bull Ring market. This whole area was criss-crossed by a network of railway tracks, wharfs and sidings, canals and roads, which were part of a communications system that had evolved throughout the nineteenth century in response to the development of local industries and their dependency on markets and raw materials from the surrounding hinterland.[84] (See Map C.) Within that small area were located numerous businesses concerned with food manufacture, goods distribution and warehousing, and small and medium sized workshops and factories produced a variety of goods. The Bull Ring market area offered work opportunities for casual and part-time workers, unskilled labourers and street vendors who took advantage of selling their services and goods to the traders and customers there.

The Italian Quarter and the St. Bartholomew Italians

This investigation concentrates on the small Italian community who lived in the St. Bartholomew's ward, situated close to the Bull Ring market, during the period c1891-1938. The researches of Doreen Hopwood and Carl Chinn[85] have demonstrated how Italians congregated in St. Bartholomew's in just a few inter-connected streets: namely, Bartholomew Street, Buck Street, Banbury Street, Fox

---

[83]Briggs, *History of B'ham*, p 232.
[84]The development of the railway had increased further the problems of overcrowding as houses were demolished: Green and Parton, "Slums and slum life in Victorian England", p 42.
[85]Hopwood and Dilloway, *Bella Brum* and Chinn, "We all come from round Sora".

Street and Duddeston Row (See Map A) at the end of the nineteenth century. There, in an area which probably measured no more than one square mile, Italians established their 'Quarter' and lived in close proximity to each other in the many courtyards and back-to-back houses. The Italian Quarter can be regarded as being isolated in the sense that Italians were its most numerous inhabitants. Even so, although the majority of Italians in Birmingham tended to converge in the Italian Quarter other Italians lived elsewhere in city.[86] Within a half-mile of St. Bartholomew's ward lived a further eight or nine Italian families, some of whom were relatives and kin of those who lived in the St. Bartholomew's ward. In the parish of St. Martin's, Bradford Street, which is about a mile away from St. Bartholomew's, there lived another four or five Italian families. In 1916 the Italian inhabitants of the these two central wards comprised more than half the total number of Italians in Birmingham.

The term *St. Bartholomew Italians* will be used in this thesis. It refers to people who satisfy two criteria: those being within three generations of Italian born subjects, and those having lived in the Italian Quarter some time between 1891 and 1938. It has been necessary to coin this phrase for two reasons. First, a term was needed so that those who lived in the Quarter could be distinguished from Italians who lived elsewhere in Birmingham. Second, because there is no recognised term for English born children of Italian born parents, and it did not seem accurate to refer to them collectively as 'Italians'.

In addition to developing the phrase *St. Bartholomew Italians* it has been necessary to establish a method of differentiating between periods in the history of the Quarter. This is important since an examination of the changes and continuities over time forms a crucial component of this research. However, providing such a model has proved problematic and it has been decided that the least complicated criterion is

---

[86]In 1891 the census abstract stated 140 Italians lived in Birmingham, of these 106 lived in the Italian Quarter: *Census 1891.* In 1916 531 adult Italians were registered in Birmingham of which 232 lived in the Italian Quarter: *Aliens Registers.*

one based on the different generations of St. Bartholomew Italians who lived in the Quarter. Even so, difficulties remain because the age structure of the first St. Bartholomew Italians who arrived in the Quarter was extremely varied. The St. Bartholomew Italian population can be divided into three groups or generations, which it is possible to define broadly by nationality and age. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 3, the first generation of Italians to inhabit the Quarter arrived at the beginning of the 1890s. From then until around 1905 was the period when the majority of Italians arrived in the Quarter from Italy. (See Table 6) The status and ages of these, the first generation of St. Bartholomew Italians, was considerably varied: some were young, single adults whilst others were married with young children. The prolonged migration and disparate age range of the first generation of St. Bartholomew Italians resulted in Italian born adults, infants and children living among younger relatives who were born in Britain. For the purpose of this research, those aged 18 years and over on their arrival in Britain, and who lived here before 1905, will be called the first generation.[87] The second generation had at least one Italian born parent, but might have been born in Italy or Britain. The third generation were born in Britain after 1920. The model which has been constructed to illustrate how St. Bartholomew Italians will be defined over time, is not without its flaws, and even though there were some living in the Italian Quarter for whom these criteria are not valid, they are a minority.

The Evidence

The evidence used in this thesis is varied; however, three sources in particular have proved to be the most significant: the census, local newspapers and the oral testimonies of St. Bartholomew Italians. The diverse nature of these sources and the

---

[87]Two reasons why the age limit of 18 years has been used: this would have ended their formative period and it is the age used in the Aliens Registers to define adulthood.

differences between the social classes of their authors offers a broad cross-section of opinions, which have provided extensive quantitative and qualitative evidence.

The Census

Two types of population census have provided quantitative data: the Decennial Population Census of England and Wales, 1841-1891 and the Aliens Registers[88] of 1916. Statistical and more general information about the immigrant population in England and Wales has been obtained from the census abstracts for the period 1891-1931. Although this research is primarily concerned with the period 1891-1938 chapter two discusses the early Italian population in Birmingham and uses occupational and demographic data from the censuses 1841-1881. In chapters 3 and 4 extensive use has been made of the population censuses taken in 1891 and 1916 from which comparisons have been drawn about the changes and continuities in the demographic and occupational structures of the St. Bartholomew Italians. These numerous censuses have been relied on for information about a community for which there are few alternative documentary sources available. Even so, although the evidence provided by these censuses is without precedent, in common with all sources they too have limitations, errors and ambiguities which will be discussed where relevant in subsequent chapters of this thesis. What follows is a general discussion outlining the application of these sources, their weaknesses and how the methodological problems encountered during this research were overcome.

However, before proceeding with this discussion, an explanation will be given about the presentation of the statistics collated from these censuses. Several problems are inherent in this type of research where a very small sample is being used, and one of these difficulties is how best to express statistical data.

---

[88]The term 'Aliens' will be used throughout (without an apostrophe}as it appears in the: *Index of Public General Acts*, British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act, 1914.

Presenting statistics using percentages, as is the most usual method in research of this type, has been problematic in this thesis, for the slightest modification of figures tends to exaggerate findings. Therefore, so that there is a clear understanding of these figures, in some of the tables absolute numbers and percentages have been used.

The Decennial Population Census of England and Wales, 1841-1891

Demographic and occupational information about the early Italians in Birmingham have been collected from several sources, including local trades directories and church registers, but the bulk of details have been obtained from the 1841-1881 censuses.

One of the earliest records of Italians living in Birmingham was made by Edwin Chadwick's health inspectors who came to Birmingham in 1842. The brief report they made about lodging houses in the centre of Birmingham indicated that Italians were then living in Park Street and Lichfield Street.[89] The census revealed that Italians had also lived in those streets in 1841.[90] In subsequent census years Italians lived not only in those streets but also in others adjoining Park Street and Lichfield Street. By sampling the streets and the connecting streets where Italians lived an examination of almost all of the St. Bartholomew and St. Martin's wards was carried out. Even so, this covered only a small area of Birmingham. Because a complete review of the census of Birmingham was not feasible, local trades directories were used to expand the search. The addresses of people having Italianate names listed in these directories were cross-checked in the census and their streets sampled for other Italians. It is, of course, obvious that even though this method was effective it would not guarantee that all of the Italians who lived in Birmingham during the period would be located: Italians who did not advertise in the directories would have been omitted, as would Italian women who married and no longer had an Italianate name. Nonetheless, it is

---

[89] *Report on the Health and Sanitary Conditions, 1842.*
[90] In Holborn, London a whole of area of connecting streets were inhabited by Italians: Sponza, *Realities and Images*, p 20.

believed that this method of sampling has located the majority of Italians who lived in Birmingham during the nineteenth century, for only a very small number of the Italianate names that appear in the baptism and marriage registers of local Roman Catholic churches have not been found in the census.

The censuses are the most reliable sources of demographic information available for the nineteenth century, yet it is unlikely they recorded everyone in England and Wales. Enumeration was hindered by a number of factors: a major one being the layout of suburbs. An under-registration of Italians in Birmingham very probably occurred because of the nature of the accommodation in which they lived: lodging houses, and the area in which they were situated, which was noted for its labyrinthine layout.[91] In addition to accidental omissions it is possible that some Italians deliberately avoided registration, perhaps dubious about its *real* purpose, or for fear of intimidation. Furthermore, as Sponza has pointed out, those Italians who came in the summer months would have missed the enumeration since it usually occurred in the early spring.[92]

At the end of the nineteenth century concerns were being voiced about the perceived rapidly increasing immigrant population in England and Wales and these fears led to pressure being put on enumerators to record details accurately in the census of 1901. At that time the belief was held by some, that past censuses had grossly under-registered the number of immigrants, and that one of the causes was language difficulties.[93] The census provides much evidence of the problems which were created by language. For example, names are mispelt, and the words 'foreign' or 'lodger' were sometimes inserted in the status column in lieu of a title.[94] It is also

---

[91]J. Cuming-Walters provides a vivid account of the central wards where the Italians lived and describes how hostile the area was perceived to have been by outsiders: J. Cuming-Walters, "Scenes in Slumland", *B'ham Daily Gazette,* 1901.
[92]Sponza, *Realities and Images,* p 55.
[93]It was noted in the 1901 census how problems of language may have interfered with the calculation of immigrants in previous enumerations. Consequently it was suggested Rabbis helped Jews to complete their enumerations: *Census, 1901,* p 139.
[94]The words 'foreign' and 'lodger' appear more often in the 1841census.

likely that incomplete employment details are a consequence of language problems and interpretation difficulties.[95]

Although the censuses probably contain the most detailed occupational data available for the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one of their greatest drawbacks is their failure to include part-time employment or multiple occupations.[96] This is particularly frustrating since Italians often relied on more than one source of income, like so many others who belonged to the poor working-class in Britain.[97] Furthermore, the non-completion of details about Italian women's occupations does not permit a thorough research.[98]

The Aliens Registers[99]

The other type of census which has been used in this research are the Aliens Registers of 1916. These registers were introduced in Britain as part of the Defence of the Realm Act[100] and at that time were unique in Britain, for previously none had contained such detailed information, nor had any concentrated specifically on the immigrant population.

The Aliens Restrictions Act enabled the government to introduce a system of registration, which was aimed at regulating the movement of immigrants and to help

---

[95]The way in which questions about work/employment/occupations were phrased could have produced quite different answers. For example, "what work do you do?" Does not tell us if a person was currently employed.
[96]Some London enumerators did record the types of part-time work done by Italians: Sponza, *Realities and Images*, p 94.
[97]J. Benson, *The Working Class in England, 1875-1914*, Croom Helm, 1984, p 68.
[98]Enumerators were mindful of middle-class values and therefore probably under-recorded the extent of women's employment: S. O. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth Century England*, California, 1992.
[99]The British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act of 1914, Section 27, stated, "the expression "alien" means a person who is not a British subject", i.e., "anyone who is (not) a natural-born subject, or a person to whom a certification of naturalisation has (not) been granted": *Index of Public General Acts*, Edw.VII, Ch 13.
[100]The registration of immigrants was introduced as part of the Aliens Restrictions Act, 1914 which was borne out of the Aliens Act of 1905: *Ibid.*

the British authorities identify potential subversives during the First World War.[101] Under the regulations of this act immigrants aged 18 years and over, of all foreign nationalities, irrespective of their being from a 'friendly' or 'enemy' country, had to register with their local police station and get permission for each journey of more than five miles from their home.[102] These registers contain detailed personal information about immigrants and their families, and include occupational, marital and home owner status data. In addition, immigrants had to supply information about how long they had lived in Britain and in Birmingham and, in a column headed "comments", details about their military service and time spent away from home were recorded.

Although the registers are much more detailed than the decennial censuses, they too have weaknesses, for they were not intended to provide general population information. Instead, their purpose was to enable the authorities to identify foreign-born adult males who might have been a risk to national security during the First World War. It was because this was the aim that the authorities did not ask for information about second generation Italians; those who were aged 18 years and under; women who were married to British citizens;[103] or Italians who were temporarily away from their Birmingham home for the duration of the war who had enlisted in the army.[104]

Whilst these registers provide abundant demographic and occupational information, in common with the decennial census they tend to be misleading about employment. The registers were compiled under war-time circumstances which means they contain information which was both exceptional and temporary, for it is clear that

---

[101] Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, p 94.
[102] *B'ham Police Orders*, 17.8.14.
[103] *Index of Public General Acts*, British Nationality and the Status of Aliens Act, 1914, Part III, Clause, 10.
[104] These men would have been single and in their late adolescence or twenties. A recruitment campaign took place in B'ham in 1916: *B'ham Daily Mail*, 2.6.15. The exact number of Italians from B'ham who joined either the British or the Italian army is unknown. Respondents who had relatives in World War One were not numerous. See: BEF3011, MMM2022 and GSF3017.

some Italians were not usually employed in the type of work they stated as their occupation in these registers. This is apparent where men gave their occupation as 'floor layers', but registered their employers as companies that were unconnected with building work.[105]

Newspapers

A substantial amount of the evidence used in this research has been collected from local daily and weekly newspapers.[106] The selection was random, but different weeks each year, and for every year during the period 1891-1938 a minimum of 4, but often 6, weeks' newspapers were sampled. They were also examined on occasions when it was known that particular annual or special events had occurred in Birmingham.[107] The number of materials relating to St. Bartholomew Italians is patchy, with the least number of articles during the 1920s. Even so, sufficient evidence has been located to be able to gauge local opinions about immigration, immigrants and the Italian population.

Until the 1930s and the introduction of radio, newspapers were one of only a few news media available to the public, and because of this limited access newspapers had the potential to be enormously influential.[108] Through their use of language, dramatic or eye-catching headlines and the positioning of articles within the newspaper, the public could be persuaded to share the opinions of journalists and editors.[109] In addition to these subtle methods of conveying their viewpoint, the

---

[105]For example, Francisco Rubini, a 36 year old "mosaic floor layer", registered his employer as the "British Small Arms Company"; sixty-six year old Luigi Sartori, from Piacenza, registered the same occupation but was employed by "Railway, Hockley Hill", and Geremia Capliano, from Rome, also a floor layer, registered his employer as the "Gas Works, Nechells": *Aliens Registers.*

[106]A complete list of the newspapers referred to in this thesis is provided in the bibliography.

[107]For example, the annual May Day processions.

[108]Many, if not all, of the observations being made about newspapers during the 1890-1930s period continue to be applicable today.

[109]J. Beaumont-Hughes, "The Press and the Public During the Boer War, 1899-1902", *The Historian*, Vol. 61, 1991, p 10.

sympathies and ideology of the editorial staff were aired explicitly through specially assigned columns in the newspaper, which appeared close to the front page.[110] Newspapers were produced exclusively by the middle-class, who had their own notions about what was respectable and acceptable behaviour. The articles they produced were coloured by their perceptions and many were highly subjective.

The need for newspapers to be profitable determined their content and the presentation of news. In order that their readership was sustained, or enlarged, newspaper articles had to be topical, interesting as well as offer an acceptable viewpoint. A measure of the public's reaction towards news items can be estimated from their letters to the editor. Even so, they should be treated with caution for just as it was the editors' decision about which topics should be printed, he chose which letters would be included.[111]

Judging from the abundance of material in local newspapers relating to immigration and immigrants, these were topics of extreme importance to the public in Birmingham. Copious articles were published concerned with parliamentary debates and legislation about immigration from the early 1890s to the early 1920s, and particularly during the period, 1904 to about 1911.[112] Local newspapers presented the public with news items collected from all over Britain detailing the behaviour of

---

[110]For example, the column "Table Talk" appeared regularly in the *B'ham Daily Mail*. The "News of the Day" column was where the editor of the *B'ham Daily Post* made his comments. During the Aliens Bill debate the editor used this column to give his opinion about the proposed Bill and stated, "the law as it stands today, has proved powerless to prevent the influx of the alien scum of Europe": *B'ham Daily Post*, 26.4.04. An example of overseas reports see: "Traits of Aliens", *B'ham Daily Post*, 13.4.11.

[111]J. Tunstall, *Newspaper Power. The New National Press in Britain*, Oxford U.P, 1996, p 3.

[112]Comparatively fewer articles appeared locally on the subjects of immigration and immigrants in Britain during the 1920s and 1930s. However, a notable exception is the article entitled, "Secret Invasion. Foreign Criminals and how to deal with them": *B'ham Mail*, 17.9.26.

immigrants, and even reprinted international reports about the perceived harmful influences immigrants were having abroad.[113]

Many newspaper articles made it very clear in their headings that they were about immigrants and almost all of those located related stories which promoted the image of immigrants as unsociable.[114] This was also true of the majority of the articles about the Italians who lived in Birmingham. Despite there being comparatively few Italians there throughout the period, they received far more press attention than any other ethnic group in Birmingham. In articles which described Italian culture and work, and other aspects of their life-style, they were presented to the public as, at worst undesirables, and at best as different from the Birmingham population.[115]

Oral testimonies

The third major type of evidence used in this research is oral testimony which has been collected from St. Bartholomew Italians and Italians who lived elsewhere in Birmingham and regularly visited or worked with people in the Quarter. Oral evidence is a very different medium from those previously discussed. Nonetheless, it requires the same caution and skill in handling as any other historical source. In the past the use of oral history has engendered an enormous amount of discussion and criticism regarding its integrity as an historical source. In particular, concern has been voiced about the methods used for collecting informants' testimonies and the reliability of

---

[113]For example, "Another Alien Criminal", related the story of a German who lived in London, who had committed a burglary. The newspaper ended with the summing up of the judge who stated, "We have quite enough criminals and crime of our own without importing others": *B'ham Daily Post*, 13.10.04. See also reports about Southampton: *B'ham Daily Post*, 1.4.04; Lancashire: *B'ham Daily Post*, 25.11.05; Liverpool: *B'ham Daily Gazette*, 8.4.11; Liverpool: *B'ham Daily Post*, 5.8.15.

[114]For example: "Irish Labourer Fined": *B'ham Daily Post*, 5.7.04; "The Undesirable Alien": *B'ham Gazette and Express*, 22.3.11; "Foreigners in B'ham": *B'ham Daily Mail*. 16.9.16. See also footnotes 66 and 69 above.

[115]For example: "The Italian Row": *B'ham Post*, 6.4.04; "Affray in the Italian Quarter": *B'ham Post*, 19.9.05; "Italians at Variance": *B'ham Post*, 30.6.15; "Deportation of Italians": *B'ham Daily Mail*, 31.8.17; "Fascists in B'ham": *B'ham Mail*, 6.1.27; "Little Italy and Knife Rule Gone": *B'ham Sunday Despatch*, .10.4.38.

their evidence.[116] The respect which oral evidence now enjoys is due primarily to the research of historians such as Paul Thompson and Elizabeth Roberts. Their studies are not only methodological landmarks, but have revealed aspects of history which were previously hidden or difficult to access. As a consequence of their research few doubts remain about the value and importance of history contributed by oral testimonies.[117]

The significance of oral testimony in the reconstruction of the history of minority groups is also gaining recognition,[118] and in this research it has enhanced the study of Italians and their descendants in Birmingham.[119] The St. Bartholomew Italians constituted a small community which left very little documented information about their lives or how they were received in Birmingham.[120] The dearth of evidence partly results from the fact that few of the older Italians who lived in the Italian Quarter possessed the literary skills necessary to record their lives,[121] but also because, like so many working class people, they probably doubted their lives were sufficiently interesting to warrant a record being kept.[122] Poor literacy, the common self-deprecating view held by many that their opinions are of little value or interest, and their need to spend time more productively, has resulted in a shortage of

---

[116]For a review of the debate see: P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, Oxford U.P, 1988, chapters 2 and 3.

[117]All of the studies by Thompson and Roberts are useful. In particular see: P. Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society*, Routledge, 1992 and E. Roberts, "Working class Women in the North West", *Oral History*, Vol. 5, No.2, 1977.

[118]For example, see: Di Felice, *The Italian Community in Manchester, 1880-1945.* For a collection of oral histories see: "Migration", *Oral History*, Vol. 27, No.1, 1999.

[119]This study is not the first oral history of Italians in B'ham. See: Hopwood and Dilloway, *Bella Brum* and Chinn, "We All come from round Sora".

[120]Two accounts of Italian life in Birmingham have been located.

[121]The lack of literacy skills, in either Italian or English will be discussed later. However, many respondents have commented on the inability of their relatives to read or write.

[122]So many of the Italians who were interviewed during the course of this research were initially surprised to find their testimony would be useful or interesting. I am sure that for many of the respondents, talking to me about their life experiences gave them a lot of pleasure and increased their feelings of self-worth.

documentary evidence produced by the working-class.[123] Therefore oral evidence offers an opportunity to recover aspects of working class life which otherwise might not be revealed, and also to give a "voice to those people who made and experienced history"[124] who otherwise might not be heard.

Although it would be untrue to claim that the history of the St. Bartholomew Italians would have been lost without their narratives, their testimonies have permitted perspectives of their lives to be revealed - something which few documentary sources would have succeeded in doing. Furthermore, using oral evidence has helped to overcome another inherent problem related to the history of minority groups: namely that most of the evidence produced about them during the first half of the twentieth century was written by middle class observers. Useful though their information is in providing detail and in gauging their perceptions, it must be remembered first, that their attitudes were coloured by class, culture and social mores quite distinct from the communities they judged. Second, although the influence of the middle class should not be underestimated, they represent only one part of British society and therefore, their attitudes ought not be accepted as the only opinions. The partiality of middle class judgements gives emphasis to the importance of striving for a balance of opinions in the evidence being used. The documents produced by members of the middle class often stereotyped the working class and gave only snapshots of life which, unlike oral evidence, fail to reveal "the complexities and variety of working class experience".[125]

The respondents chosen for this research have personal knowledge of the Italian Quarter at some time during the period 1891-1938. With the exception of those interviewed for the Digbeth and Deritend Project,[126] and the terrazzo workers who came to Britain in the early 1920s, all of the respondents were within three

---

[123]A. Hoffman, "Reliability and Validity in Oral History", D.K. Dunaway and W.K. Baum (eds), *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, Alta Mira, 1996, p 92.
[124]Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, p 2.
[125]E. Roberts, *A Woman's Place. An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890-1940*, Oxford U.P, 1984, p 38.
[126]In addition to testimonies collected by myself are some which were recorded by the Deritend and Digbeth Project during the 1980s.

generations of the original St. Bartholomew Italian settlers and most had lived in the Quarter at some time. Those who had not lived in the Quarter either had close relatives living there whom they visited regularly, or they had lived a short distance away, were Italian and worked with St. Bartholomew Italians.[127]

Locating respondents was not too difficult. It is fortunate that many of the St. Bartholomew Italians keep in regular contact with each other, despite being scattered throughout the midlands. After identifying St. Bartholomew Italian families from the Aliens Registers prospective respondents were contacted through three of the oldest surviving members of the Quarter.[128] These St. Bartholomew Italians provided the names and addresses of potential interviewees and were particularly helpful in locating Italian women who had changed their name after marriage. Of those respondents who arrived in Birmingham after the compilation of the Aliens Registers in 1916, most were terrazzo workers who were identified and located through other terrazzo workers from the St. Bartholomew's Italian community. All of the respondents were born before 1928, and most were born during the early 1920s. The oldest respondent was a female who was born in the Italian Quarter in 1904. It was an initial aim of this research that an equal number of men and women would be interviewed, but this proved to be difficult. Instead, a total of seventeen women and eleven men were interviewed, which has amounted to more than seventy hours of recorded testimonies.

Since a number of respondents were aged over sixty and many had little contact with people who were not family members, it was decided to use an informal method of interview. (See Appendix II for extracts of the interviews conducted.) This took place in the respondents' home and was intended to increase their confidence and trust in me.[129] Sometimes two or three visits were made to respondents, and

---

[127]Most of these were male Italian terrazzo workers who recruited labour from among the St. Bartholomew Italians. These were kindly supplied by Birmingham Central Reference Library and belonged to the Deritend and Digbeth Project.
[128]Three St. Bartholomew Italians who were particularly knowledgeable and helpful were Mrs. Beatrice Eastment, Mrs. Eileen Kenny and Mr. Joe Mattiello.
[129]The more formal interview method of asking a 'set' of questions to every respondent was rejected on the grounds that respondents regarded the interviews as

recording occurred only after an introductory meeting or long telephone conversation had taken place. It was during these preliminary conversations that the respondent's reliability, suitability and usefulness were assessed. Many of the respondents were nervous about being interviewed and also surprised about being chosen. The informal style of interview helped to provide an atmosphere in which the respondent could 'chat', and it is because of this that some of the recordings include information about my personal and family details, as most respondents knew my family. The impression was often given by respondents that because I am a descendant of the St. Bartholomew Italians, I was considered as one of their community. It was obvious that respondents regarded the interviews as social events and appeared to be quite relaxed. Even so, despite their apparent ease, on several occasions and in the full realisation that the recorder had been switched off, respondents confided further information of a more intimate nature. If their information was useful I would ask them to repeat it on tape and in some instances they refused, but often gave me permission to paraphrase their additional testimony. All the respondents have been given anonymity and are referred to throughout this thesis by their index number,[130] and it was hoped that by giving anonymity respondents would provide a frank testimony.

Of particular importance in this study has been the use of oral history to reveal information about women's lives and family life. The paucity of documentary evidence relating to these topics makes oral testimony particularly useful. Even so, obtaining information from respondents about how women spent their time, either within or outside the home, often proved to be difficult. Many respondents responded to general questions asked about their mothers with the reply that, "she didn't do much" or "she did what all the other mothers did", and further more specific questioning was

---

social occasions. Although every respondent was aware of the tape recorder, my aim was to make the process of recording as unobtrusive as possible in order to create a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

[130]Each respondent's number, personal and general details are provided in Appendix I

then required to obtain detailed information. Yet, respondents were much more forthcoming about fathers, brothers and uncles and in answer to general questions they invariably and immediately gave very detailed accounts of the work men had done.

Nostalgia or an inclination to exaggerate were other common hazards encountered whilst collecting narratives. There was also a tendency for respondents to provide narratives which reflected stubborn preconceived ideas about life in the past.[131] As a consequence, particular occurrences, family practices and their attitudes had to be detected through more subtle means than direct questioning. For example, respondents linked together seemingly unrelated topics which revealed their attitudes, such as poverty with dirtiness; the subtext of their testimonies disclosed their complex struggle with identity; and their sequencing of events communicated the conflicts which had occurred between parents and children who attempted to break the ties of family which were imposed through Italian culture. Thus, transcribing and translating these testimonies has produced within me similar feelings to those experienced by Paul Thompson and others,[132] and the difficulty of being torn between loyalty to the respondent and the importance of revealing history, in that I too, hesitated "to give meanings to their words which they would wish to reject".[133]

This thesis examines many of the topics investigated in past research. For example, migration, demography, work and social organisations and clubs using evidence collected from the census, trade directories, and church registers. However, this research departs from previous Italian community studies in two significant ways; namely in relation to chronology and methodology. Most of the past research has

---

[131]For example, when asked if their mothers had worked, the majority replied, 'women didn't work in those days', and then later in the interview they would describe how their mothers had taken in washing, 'run a little shop for me dad', or worked for an in-law. Their initial replies had been based on a common misconception about the past and narrow definition of work.

[132]Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, p 239; Thapar-Bjokert, "Nationalist memories: interviewing Indian middle-class nationalist women", *Oral History*, Vol. 27, 1999, pp 35-47.

[133]Thompson, *ibid.*

overlooked the Edwardian period, which was the time when Italian communities were becoming established and the first generation were rearing children. Life in Italian communities during the 1920s and 1930s has received only superficial attention from historians and consequently community interaction, gender roles, children and relations between the host society and the Italians have been largely ignored. By examining the period 1891-1938 this research will both broaden and intensify the knowledge about Italian immigrants. Furthermore, by using historical sources, such as the Aliens Registers, oral testimonies and newspapers in conjunction with the more usual types of evidence, this research demonstrates that studies of small communities, such as the St. Bartholomew Italians, are feasible.

The structure of the thesis

In the chapters that follow, the history and experience of the St. Bartholomew Italians community are revealed. Chapter 2, "Italians in Birmingham during the nineteenth century", examines the demographic and occupational structure of the Italian population in Birmingham during the first ninety years of the nineteenth century and offers explanations as to why so few Italians settled there. Chapter 3, "Demography and settlement in the Italian Quarter", investigates the development of the St. Bartholomew Italian community, where immigration, endogenous growth and the living conditions in the Quarter are examined. In Chapter 4, "Work", the occupational structure of the Italian Quarter is discussed and the work and incomes of St. Bartholomew Italian men, women and children are revealed. Chapter 5, "Community, Family and Neighbourhood", addresses social interaction within the Italian Quarter and neighbourhood. In order to do this gender roles, social networks and hierarchies and family and household structure are examined. Finally, Chapter 6, "Perceptions", examines the attitudes held by some of the local population towards the St. Bartholomew Italians and the Italian Quarter. The study concludes with a synthesis of the findings of each chapter, together with an assessment of the contributions made by this research to the study of history.

Chapter Two - ITALIANS IN BIRMINGHAM DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Chapter 2 describes the development of the Italian community in Birmingham from the start of the nineteenth century to the eighteen eighties. Beginning with a detailed demographic, social and occupational study of the Italian population, this chapter traces the changes and continuities that occurred. In addition, local attitudes are examined in relation to aspects of the work and living conditions of Italians in Birmingham.

Following an outbreak of cholera, Edwin Chadwick's health and sanitary inspectors came to Birmingham in the early 1840s. As part of their investigation into the causes of the disease they visited the central areas which included the infamous Park Street and Lichfield Street, where the quality of life for the numerous inhabitants was dire. These streets had achieved notoriety through the poverty and accompanying squalor of the many lodging houses located there, and were described by the inspectors as, "... generally in a very filthy condition; and, being the resorts of the most abandoned characters, they are sources of extreme misery and vice ... in the day time the doors of these houses are generally thronged with dirty, half-dressed women ... (and at night) the sexes indiscriminately sleep together".[1] Equally as distasteful, in the opinion of the inspectors, were the inhabitants of the lodging houses whom they categorised into three types, "mendicants, ... Irish, ...and ... prostitutes."[2]

Lichfield Street was demolished before the end of the nineteenth century and lay close to the centre of Birmingham, and one of its worst slum districts, the Minories. Park Street still remains and is situated close to the Bull Ring market.

---

[1] *Report on the Health and Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population Great Britain, 1842.*
[2] *Ibid.*

From around the 1840s it was home to many Irish who lived in the one hundred and twenty-two lodgings houses situated there.[3] The Irish population was scattered throughout Birmingham during the nineteenth century[4] and although their numbers were not great in comparison with other large towns in Britain at that time, their presence was acutely felt. Park Street was reported to have had one of the highest concentrations of Irish in Birmingham in 1847,[5] and has been described by Carl Chinn as "... vilified as having a mixture of the worst class of Irish and thieves."[6] The streets in which the Irish lived were well known, having a reputation for violence which continued until at least 1867 and the so-called Park Street 'riot'.[7]

The nineteenth century was a period of urban growth and migration as people moved around the country in search of work and, in addition to the Irish, lodging houses in Birmingham housed migrants from all over the United Kingdom.[8] Also within its rapidly growing population included a number of Americans and Europeans. Even though their numbers were not great, and the ratio of immigrants to the town's total population low, there was a diverse ethnic presence in the town.[9] Indeed,

---

[3] In 1851 46% of the Park Street population was Irish. In 1861 the Irish population peaked at 11,322, 3.8% of the total B'ham population, and was by far the largest ethnic group there at that time: C. Chinn, "Sturdy Irish Emigrants: the Irish in early Victorian B'ham," in R. Swift and S. Gilley (eds), *The Irish in Victorian Britain. The Local Dimension,* Four Courts Press, 1999, p 53. Irish also settled in other areas of the town, see: J. Champ, *Assimilation and Separation: The Catholic Revival in B'ham c1650-1850,* PhD thesis, B'ham University, 1986. R. Dennis estimates 4-5% of the population in England was Irish in 1851: R. Dennis, *English Industrial Cities of the Nineteenth Century,* Cambridge U.P, 1984, p 37.

[4] Champ, *Assimilation and Separation.*

[5] Reporting on the Park Street Mission it was estimated about 200 Irish children attended there in the autumn of 1847: *B'ham Catholic Magazine,* Aug, 1913, p 389.

[6] Chinn, "Sturdy Catholic Emigrants", p 63.

[7] It is claimed that a disservice was done to the reputation of the Irish who were held wholly responsible for the fighting between Protestants and Catholics in Park Street, in 1867. However, it has been suggested that Protestant agitators deliberately stirred up the trouble that caused damage to properties in Park Street: Chinn, "Sturdy Irish Emigrants", p 53.

[8] The 1851 census shows that half of the Birmingham population was born outside the area: E.H.Hunt, *British Labour History, 1815-1914,* Weidensfeld and Nicolson, 1981, p 173.

[9] A total of 1,000 foreign born people lived in B'ham in 1861: Germans, 22.08%;

Chadwick's inspectors particularly noted that, "[S]ome of the [lodging] houses [are] occupied exclusively by foreigners," and they identified, "... Germans, and Flemish ... a court in Park Street, ... which was inhabited by Italians, men and women, with their stock of musical instruments, monkeys, and other small animals," and another Italian lodging house in Lichfield Street.[10]

The discovery of these Italians might have shocked the inspectors and, to some extent, this would have been an understandable reaction given the cultural contrasts between these English, middle class inspectors and the poor Italian immigrants. Not only were there phenotypic differences[11] and in their style of dress, but also those differences created by their foreign language, barrel organ and accordion music, and by the smells emitted from their unfamiliar food. Furthermore, finding Italians in Britain at that time was fairly unusual, since estimates place their total in England and Wales at probably no more than 3,500.[12]

Throughout the nineteenth and first decade of the twentieth centuries, the Italian population in Britain gradually increased. During the first half of the nineteenth century, predominant among these Italians were craftsmen, such as precision instrument makers and carvers and gilders, who originated from the northern regions of Italy, and in particular Como.[13]

French, 18.35%; Americans, 12.33%; Polish, 9.22%; and Italians, 8.75%: *Dicennial Population Census of England and Wales, 1861*, (hereafter *Census*) Table 133, p 163.

[10]*Report on Health and Sanitary Conditions, 1842*.

[11]Italian skin tones vary depending on their area of origin. Central and southern Italians have quite a dark skin tone, and almost always their hair and eyes appear black.

[12]L. Sponza, *Italian Immigrants in Nineteenth Century Britain: Realities and Images*, Leicester U.P, 1988, p 13.

[13]For detailed information about regional trades and occupations in Italy see: R.F. Foerster, *Italian Emigration in Our Times*, Arno Press, 1919; Sponza, *Realities and Images*; R. King, "Italian Migration to G. Britain", Geography, Vol. 62, 1977; T. Colpi, *The Italian Factor*, Edinburgh, 1991; U. P; J.E. Zucci, *The Little Slaves of the Harp*, McGill-Queen's, 1991.

Early nineteenth century Italians in Birmingham

During the period which began during the last decades of the eighteenth century and ended in the 1840s, young, single Italians males came to Britain to work and settle.[14] It is unlikely there were many in Britain at that time due to the difficulties of travelling from Europe. Such journeys, apart from being expensive and lengthy, were dangerous due to the Napoleonic wars.[15] An estimate of the number of Italians who lived in Birmingham before the middle of the nineteenth century is difficult to make, as reliable statistical evidence is unavailable before 1840. Previous writers have noted just two Italians in the town: one at around the turn of the eighteenth century, named Carlotti, a barometer maker, and another Carlo Falossi, who originated from Siena, and who in 1853, " was a painter".[16] Even so, there is ample evidence to suggest Italians lived scattered around Birmingham from at least the 1780s. They married local women, had their marriages blessed[17] and their babies baptised at the two local Roman Catholic churches.[18] Between 1795 and 1839, a minimum of 32 babies were baptised with Italianate family names.[19]

---

[14]To come to England and work under the patronage of a craftsmen was not an unusual practice for Italians: Sponza, *Realities and Images*, p 59.
[15]Sponza, *Realities and Images*, p 23.
[16]D. Hopwood, "Cornets and Courtyards: A hundred years of Italian settlement in B'ham", *Midland Historian*, October, 1996, p 5; C. Chinn "We All Come From 'round Sora, 1821-1919", O. Ashton, R. Fyson and S. Roberts (eds), *The Duty of Discontent. Essays for Dorothy Thompson*, Mansell, 1995, p 4.
[17]Although Roman Catholicism became recognised in Britain during the second half of the eighteenth century, in order for marriages to be legally recognised the service had to be conducted at a Protestant church. Many Catholics chose to have their marriage solemnised in a catholic chapel as well. In B'ham there is evidence of couples marrying at both Protestant and Catholic chapels. See: IGI and marriage registers of St. Peter's and St. Chad's RC Chapels.
[18]Until the 1840s in B'ham there were only 2 Roman Catholic chapels - St. Peter's and St. Chad's. From the beginning of the nineteenth century the number of Catholic chapels in the city increased. In 1846, probably in response to the number of Irish who lived there, the ward of St. Bartholomew's got its own Roman Catholic chapel, St. Michael's, which remained the main place or worship for St. Bartholomew Italians throughout the period.
[19]Many of these surnames have been identified as Italian in subsequent censuses.

Between 1787 and 1835 there were a small number of craftsmen and professionals living in Birmingham whose family name and type of trades in which they worked suggest they were Italians.[20] These men and their families were dispersed through various streets within the parish of St. Martin's, close to the Bull Ring market, which probably acted as an incentive to live in that particular area of the town. An example is Peter Borini, who was born in 1783 and was a carver and gilder of picture and looking glass frames.[21] In 1808 Peter married Mary Ann Henley[22] and between 1810 and 1832 the couple's ten babies were baptised at St. Chad's RC chapel.[23] This family lived in Bull Street until at least 1841 after which no further information about them has been found.[24]

Even though this family and other Italians lived in the same parish, they appear to have been a disparate group, whose life-styles showed significant differences. Unlike the Italian craftsmen who settled in London in the early nineteenth century, it seems that very few of the Italians in Birmingham remained there for long. Of those Italians who lived there at the beginning of the nineteenth century, only one or two had descendants in Birmingham throughout the century. One such family, who have been traced until at least 1910, were the Peverelles.[25] Louis Peverelle was born in Italy in

---

[20]See trades directories: 1787-8 *Pye's Directory*; 1830 *West's Directory*; 1825 and 1833 *Wrightson's Directory for B'ham*; 1828/9 and 1835 *Pigot's National and Commercial Directory*.

[21]*Wrightson's Trades Directory for B'ham*, 1825.

[22]*St. Martin's Church of England Marriage Register*, 14.10.1808.

[23]*St. Chad's RC Chapel Baptism Registers*.

[24]The occupation of carver and gilder was a common trade for Italians who migrated from the Como region, and was affiliated to precision instrument making and glass blowing. This craft began to decline mid-way through the century as a result of the increasing tendency for precision instruments to be factory made, and this might help to explain why Peter Borini can not be traced in Birmingham after 1841. Although present in London until 1861, this trade might have already been in decline for at least the previous ten years: Sponza, *Realties and Images*, p 58.

[25]In the census the spelling of Peverelle is inconsistent. However, using dates of birth it has been possible to trace the various Peverelle family members throughout the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries, see, "J. B Peverelle and Son, Looking glass manfctr., carver and gilder", 63 Pershore St: *Kelly's Trades Directory*, 1910.

1805, and came to Birmingham with his relative Carlo, probably during the late 1820s or early 1830s.[26] Both men initially worked as brace and belt makers and lived in the parish of St. Martin's, in Edgbaston Street.[27] Louis married Birmingham born Eliza[28] and between 1831 and 1850 they had two children.[29] Some time during the period 1851 to 1871 Carlo married Gloucester-born Henrietta and together with their two children, they too lived in Edgbaston Street.[30] Between 1872 and 1890 Carlo and his family moved to live to another part of the town, where they had a wholesale hardware business.[31] Between 1841 and 1851 Louise and Carlo were joined by John Peverelle, a picture frame maker, who lived in Pershore Street with his Gloucester-born wife Mary.[32] By 1891 John was widowed and lived with his six children.[33]

Another Italian family, the Poncias, came to the town to live during the first two decades of the nineteenth century, and became well known philanthropists and supporters of St. Chad's RC cathedral. John Poncia,[34] born in 1791, was a merchant who lived in Worcester Street, in the parish of St. Martin's, with his Irish-born wife, Eliza,[35] together with their two sons and three English, female servants. In 1842 John died,[36] after which his wife and family cannot be traced in the area. Another John Poncia,[37] who was born in Italy in 1815, and later became a magistrate in

---

[26]*Census, 1841.*
[27]Louis Peverelle: *Wrightson's Trade Directory*, 1833; Carlo: *Census, 1851.*
[28]*Census, 1841.*
[29]*Census, 1851.*
[30]*Census, 1871.*
[31]*Census, 1891.*
[32]*Census, 1851.*
[33]*Census, 1891.*
[34]*Census, 1841.*
[35]Elizabeth, born in 1791, was originally named Brien: *St.Chad's RC Chapel Baptism Registers.*
[36]St. Chad's Cathedral Archdiocesan Archive.
[37]It is likely John Poncia 'senior' (born 1781) arrived in the town with two other relatives Dominic and John who both appear in later censuses. Dominic was born in Italy in 1813 and John in 1815. It has not been possible to identify the exact relationship between these various Poncia males. Both John 'senior' and Dominic were merchants in the town at the same time. However, details about the Ponicas are confusing, since both Johns married women named Eliza, one English and one Irish.

Birmingham, lived at 95 Pershore Street. During the 1870s he was sufficiently wealthy to contribute £80 to the foundation stone of St. Chad's RC cathedral and to hold a family vault there.[38] This branch of the family moved to live in the affluent suburb of Edgbaston during the 1850s,[39] and it seems probable that they were involved in the property market and continued to own premises in Pershore Street until at least 1894.[40]

The purpose of detailing the Borini, Peverelle and Poncia families is to illustrate that the Italians who came to Birmingham before the 1840s and lived in the St. Martin's parish were settled and lived in nuclear family households. The socio-economic circumstances of these three families were quite different from each other, and collectively they spanned a variety of occupations. Although these Italian craftsmen may have originated from villages which were located close to each other in Italy, there is no evidence to suggest they knew each other, or that they considered themselves to be part of an Italian community. Judging from the baptism registers, they worshipped at different Roman Catholic chapels. Furthermore, no evidence has been found to suggest these Italians were not accepted locally, for, they married local women, established long-standing local businesses and, later in the century, two of these families had relatives employed by the local police force.[41]

These Italian families can be regarded as the early pioneers of the Italian settlement in Birmingham. Their presence in the town parallels the craftsmen who lived at the same time in Holborn, and, whose settlement Sponza has suggested helped

---

St. Chad's RC Chapel marriage registers show Dominic married another member of the Poncia family, Maria in 1834, and together they lived at 58 Edgbaston Street until at least 1851. Another Poncia, Ferdinand, also lived in B'ham, though his relationship to those mentioned above is not known.

[38] *B'ham Catholic Magazine*, Dec. 1913.

[39] Anthony was born 1826, and Thomas in 1831. Both children were baptised at St. Chad's RC chapel. Father Gerard Tracey of The Oratory was most helpful in providing the details about the Poncias.

[40] An advertisement offered for rent a house and business premises owned by a Mr. John Poncia: *B'ham Daily Gazette*, 1.3.1894,

[41] (No title) B'ham Police Archive.

to "contribute to the consolidation" of the Italian community who lived there later in the century. Even so, a similar population increase to that which occurred in London did not occur in Birmingham.

Italians in the central wards of Birmingham from the 1840s to the 1880s

From at least the early 1840s dramatic shifts occurred within the demographic and socio-economic structure of the Italian population in Birmingham which were part of national changes, and stemmed from the poor economic situation in Italy caused by deforestation and enclosure of the common land.[42] Most of the Italians who came to Britain in search of work, during the nineteenth century, were males who remained here temporarily. More often they were part of a chain of migrants who originated from the same villages in Italy, who each year would travel to Europe during the spring and summer months, and return home with their earnings and information about work and accommodation. Others were brought to Britain by a padrone.[43] For the majority of both types of Italian migrants their homes were the common lodging houses of the towns and cities where they worked.

There was a stark contrast between the Italians who settled in Birmingham before the 1840s, living a family life-style which can be described as sedentary, and those who arrived from the 1840s onward, who were predominantly itinerant in character and lived in lodgings. It was these itinerant workers who formed the majority of Italians in England and Wales throughout the nineteenth century, and even though their numbers increased overall from the 1840s they remained comparatively few in relation to Britain's total population.[44]

---

[42]Sponza, *Realities and Images,* p 36.
[43]See Chapter 1, footnote 29.
[44]The number of Italians in England and Wales: 1861, 4489; 1871, 5063; 1881, 6504; 1891, 20,332: *Census, 1861-1891.*

Table 3. The Italian population in the central wards in Birmingham, 1841-1881[45]

	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881
Males	76	27	5	39	55
Females	13	0	0	8	29
Total	89	27	5	47	84

Table 3 shows the number of Italians recorded in the censuses from 1841 to 1881 living in Birmingham's central wards. The Italian population was small and numerically inconsistent throughout much of the nineteenth century. This was not unusual for, with the exception of London, itinerant Italians tended to travel the country in only small numbers.[46] Furthermore, the majority of the Italians who came to Birmingham were males, which was also characteristic of the Italian population in Britain at that time. Yet, whilst the figures in Table 3 are useful as indicators of population trends, these figures should be used only as a general guide, for the variety of reasons discussed in Chapter 1.

Table 4. Italian lodgers and lodging house keepers in the central wards of Birmingham, 1841-1881[47]

	(a) Total number of Italians in central wards	Male lodgers	Female lodgers	(b) Total Number of Italian lodgers in central wards.	(c) % of (a) who were lodgers	(d) Number of Italian lodging house keepers.
1841	89	66	9	75	84	2
1851	27	14	0	14	51	0
1861	5	0	0	0	0	0
1871	47	22	0	22	47	5
1881	84	46	25	71	84	5

---

[45] *Census, 1841-1881.*

[46] There were some regional variations in England and Wales in the number of Italians who visited, but only London and its immediate surrounding towns appeared to have had a steady increase throughout the century. Confirmed to the writer by L. Sponza in correspondence, 10.8.00.

[47] Adapted from the *Census, 1841-1881.*

Included within the figures shown in Tables 3 and 4 are the early Italian settlers, discussed above, who numbered no more than four or five families. The majority of Italians in Birmingham during the period 1841-1881 were temporary visitors, who have not been identified in more than one census. Almost of all these Italians were lodgers, and Table 4 indicates that, with the exception of 1861, lodgers comprised no fewer than 47% of the total population of Italians in Birmingham.

During the period 1841-1881 almost all of the Italian lodgers were males, with the majority being aged between 16 to 35 years. In 1841 there was a predominance of 15 year olds but this was the only census year in which youths aged under 16 years were identified in Birmingham. At no time during the period 1851-1881 did the census record any Italian children aged under 15 years living in lodgings who were not accompanied by at least one older person of the same family name, and who it is presumed was a relation. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that many Italian women came to Britain; even so, they never amounted to more than a minority within the Italian population. Only a few Italian men brought their wives to Britain, and of those couples who have been identified in the Birmingham census as married had either an English or Irish wife. Of the handful of Italian women who came to Birmingham, and who appear in Tables 3 and 4, it is likely seven were married and had children with them, and that many of them lived in lodging houses.

In Birmingham very few Italian lodgers lived in lodging houses not run by Italians.[48] During the nineteenth century the number of Italian lodging houses in Birmingham was low, and there was a frequent turnover of lodging house keepers. Furthermore, with the exception of one called John Spinetti, there is little to suggest

---

[48]In 1851, when there were no Italian run lodging houses registered in the census, but two Italians lived in English lodgings, and twelve others lived in a German run lodging house. Both of these lodging houses were in Park Street, close to where Italian-run lodging houses were located.

Italian lodging house keepers (or their lodgers) stayed in the town for as long as ten years.[49] Italian lodging house keepers played an important role in the lives of the majority of itinerant Italians, who probably depended on them for employment, or as someone who organised their employment. This was almost certainly true of young, Italian street entertainers, whose lodging house keeper was most likely to have been their master or padrone.[50] At the very least the keeper would have spoken Italian, and been able to provide some Italian hospitality. His familiarity with the town would have enabled him to give assistance and guidance to newcomers to Birmingham. Therefore, a breakdown in the Italian lodging house system could have had a significant affect on the number of itinerant Italians who visited a town. In columns (b) and (d) of Table 4 the number of Italian lodging house keepers and Italian lodgers in the town is indicated, and it is clear that when there were no Italian lodging house keepers present, in the years 1851 and 1861; the number of Italians was also fewer than in other census years, thus suggesting a correlation.

Later in this chapter it will be demonstrated how establishing a lodging house was not easy to do in Birmingham due to the strict controls imposed by the authorities. Elsewhere in Britain fewer problems may have been experienced by prospective lodging house keepers, for it has been suggested that setting up a lodging house in London, "was relatively easy for itinerant (organ) players." Lodging house keepers tended to be ex-street musicians who had been released from the employment of a

---

[49]The lodging house keeper John Spinetto, or Spinetti may have lived in B'ham in 1841, 1871, 1881 and 1891. However, two details in the census make confirmation difficult. In 1841 his date of birth is recorded as 1801 and his wife, called Mary is ten years younger. In 1871 Spinetto's date of birth was registered as 1820, and his wife was called Bernadette, born in 1830. In 1881 his date of birth was recorded as 1816 and his wife was called Matesta, born in 1820, and in 1891 his birth is registered as 1820 and his wife, called Elizabeth was born in 1830. However, his address of 36 Bartholomew Street, remained the same in 1871,1881 and 1891, and his occupation was recorded as "lodging house keeper".

[50]Green, "Little Italy in Victorian London", p 15.

padrone. Once independent they became padroni themselves, and established their own lodging houses and employed street musicians to work for them.[51]

The occupational structure of Italians living in the central wards of Birmingham, 1841-1881

During the nineteenth century between a quarter and a half of all Italians in England and Wales were employed in work relating to board and lodgings, confectionery, domestic service, street vending and entertainment, and paving and general labouring.[52] Yet, in Birmingham the occupational structure of the Italians there was much more narrow, and almost all worked in just two occupations: street vending and entertainment.[53]

The occupational information about Italians in Birmingham contained in the census is generally complete with two exceptions: data about women workers, which was discussed in Chapter 1,[54] and in 1841 the employment details of forty Italian lodgers were omitted. The largest single type of employment of Italians in England and Wales was street work: vending or entertainment.[55] These itinerant workers, particularly street musicians, tended to live in lodgings with other compatriots who were engaged in comparable occupations. This often occurred because the

---

[51] Sponza, *Realties and Images*, p 72.

[52] Sponza, *Realities and Images*, p 54.

[53] Although there were far fewer Italians in B'ham, their occupational structure tended to resemble that of the Italian community in Holborn, where street musicians, figurine and looking glass makers, gilders and picture frame makers were all apparent. However, unlike Holborn, in B'ham there were no Italian asphalters or paviours, and only one ice-cream dealer and one cafe owner throughout the nineteenth century. Italians engaged in various types of street work formed the largest group among employed Italians between 1841 and 1881, and the following statistics show the percentage of Italians engaged in street occupations in Holborn: 1841 46%; 1851 34%; 1861 30%; 1871 46%; 1881 32%. These figures do not include ice-cream vendors: Adapted from Sponza, *Ibid.*

[54] For a discussion about the tendency of census enumerators to omit details about women see: B.Hill, "Women, Work and the Census: A Problem for Historians of Women", *History Workshop*, Vol. 35, 1993.

[55] The following show the percentage of employed Italians engaged as street musicians in England and Wales: 1861 20%; 1871 18%; 1881 25%: Adapted from Sponza *Realities and Images*, p 54.

lodging house keeper was their employer or padrone. However, even independent street musicians were likely to have preferred living among other compatriots who worked in the same occupation since they would have originated from the same regions in Italy, and would have helped each other in times of illness or unemployment.[56]

There is no reason to suppose that the occupational structure of Italians in Birmingham was organised differently from elsewhere. It is therefore probable that some, if not all of the forty lodgers who appeared in the 1841 census without employment details, were street musicians or entertainers, living among others engaged in the same occupation. There are several clues which support this suggestion. Twenty-two of these forty Italians lived in the lodging house of padrone John Spinetti, together with two other street musicians. Furthermore, Chadwick's inspectors, who visited these streets where Italians lodged just a year after the 1841 census was taken described clearly Italians "with their stock of musical instruments, monkeys and other small animals," suggesting they were street musicians and entertainers.[57] It is likely that itinerant Italians knew of Italian contacts in the towns they visited. Padroni, who brought labour from Italy specifically to work in large British towns, were familiar with appropriate lodgings, as were the independent street musicians who were given information, either by compatriots who had been to Britain in previous years, or via the chain migration system.

There are at least two possible explanations as to why the occupations of these forty itinerant workers were omitted from the census: language problems and an attempt to avoid the authorities. The difficulty language caused in the enumeration of the census has been previously identified and discussed, and this is the most plausible

---

[56]It has been suggested that the organisation of organ-grinding community, living together in lodgings provided a "surrogate family ... If it were not so, it would be difficult to explain the negligible number of organ-grinders who did enter the ... workhouse": Sponza, *Realities and Images,* p 66. Furthermore, street musicians suffered physical attacks from the public and living together may have provided them with some security: Sponza, op cit, p 65.

[57]*Report on Health and Sanitary Conditions, 1842.*

reason why occupational details were not complete, in relation to Italians. Without too much difficulty it can be imagined that trying to explain street entertainment occupations in an unfamiliar language might have led the enumerator to abandon attempts to record such data. Furthermore, recording the occupational details of immigrants could have been considered inconsequential by middle-class enumerators, who were likely to have been much more interested in collecting data which would enable the calculation of the population increases in large towns, which caused alarm during the nineteenth century.[58]

The second reason for the omission of this information might have been a deliberate attempt by the lodging house keeper to conceal his role as a padrone. Twenty-nine of the male lodgers, for whom there are no occupational details, were youths aged between fifteen and twenty years. From around the 1840s Italian children and youths were engaged by padroni to entertain people on the streets by showing small animals, such as monkeys, mice or guinea-pigs, or by playing the hurdy-gurdy.[59] The British and Italian authorities condemned the padrone system, which they believed lead inevitably to immorality, and was eventually outlawed in 1873.[60] By not revealing the occupations of his lodgers, the padrone may have hoped to avoid drawing the attention of the public and town's authorities. The lodging house in Birmingham where many of these youths lived was run by the only Italian lodging house keeper to remain for more than one decade, John Spinetti. Spinetti may have decided that in order to be permitted to continue as a padrone in Birmingham, he would have to stop importing unaccompanied adolescents, because in subsequent census enumerations youths who lodged at his house were accompanied by relatives.[61]

---

[58]The population of large towns in Britain was growing rapidly during this period although little was known about its full extent.
[59]Sponza, *Realities and Images,* p 63.
[60]Foerster, *Italian Emigration.*
[61]*Census, 1841, 1871, 1881.*

There is no certain way of knowing the occupation of these forty Italian lodgers. Even so, plausible explanations have been provided to suggest that some, if not all, were street entertainers of one type or another. Therefore, it is not considered unreasonable here to presume that the twenty-nine itinerant Italians youths and adolescents who lived in these lodging houses were street entertainers, probably musicians.

Table 5. Italian Street Musicians and Costermongers in the central wards of Birmingham, 1841-1881[62]

	(a) Occupation unknown	(b) Street Musicians	(c) Statuette makers and vendors	(d) Hawkers	(e) Total number of Italians in central wards of B'ham	(f) The % of (e) in street employment
1841	11-40	5-34	2	0	89	8-40
1851	0	11	3	1	27	55
1861	0	0	1	0	5	0
1871	3	26	4	1	47	72
1881	0	47	12	0	84	70

Table 5 illustrates the number of Italian street musicians and costermongers who lived in the central wards of Birmingham during the census years, 1841 to 1881. For 1841, two sets of figures are given in columns (a), (b) and (f), which offer two alternative interpretations of the number of Italian street workers depending on the inclusion or exclusion of those for whom there are no occupational details in the census. Column (a) shows a maximum of forty Italians whose occupations were unknown, or eleven, if we accept that twenty-nine of those forty Italians were engaged in street occupations. Column (b) shows how the inclusion or exclusion of those twenty-nine Italians would affect the number of street musicians in Birmingham in 1841, and column (f) provides the minimum and maximum percentage number of Italians employed in street occupations.

---

[62]Adapted from the *Census, 1841-1881.*

If we accept that at least twenty-nine of the Italians for whom no occupational details were registered in the census, it can be seen that with the exception of 1861, for the census years 1841 to 1881, Italians street workers accounted for around a half the employed Italians who lived in the central wards of Birmingham. Even if the figures in 1841 are disregarded, the table shows that street employment was the predominant occupation among Italians in Birmingham for three of the five census years in during that period.

Table 5 indicates that the majority of the Italians who lived in Birmingham during the period 1841-1881 were engaged in one of two categories of street work: music (probably organ-grinding) or statuette vendors (also called 'figurini' or 'image makers' in the census). During this period, most Italian street musicians who came to Britain originated from the Upper Voltaro and played either hand held hurdy-gurdies, or pushed large barrel-organs which performed popular tunes, who were either independent workers or engaged by a padrone.[63]

In Birmingham it is not altogether clear who the padroni were, but it is probable they were the lodging house keepers where street musicians lived, and there are strong indications that there were at least three padroni present at various times during the period 1841-1881. One of the earliest in Birmingham was the previously mentioned lodging house keeper John Spinetti, who first appeared in the 1841 census.[64] It is also likely that Joseph Campodonico, a lodging house keeper from Genoa, who lived in Bordesley Street, in 1881, was the padrone to the twenty adult male and female musicians living in his house.[65] In the same year, and living in the same street, was another padrone, the musician and lodging house keeper Guiseppe Delicatto and his wife, who had twenty-one musicians lodging with them.[66]

---

[63]Sponza, *Realities and Images,* p 33.
[64]*Census, 1841.*
[65]*Census, 1881.*
[66]*Ibid.*

The second major group of itinerant Italian worker in Birmingham during the nineteenth century were statuette vendors who originated from Lucca and Tuscany,[67] who sold chalk and plaster images of political and religious characters. In groups of between five and seven men, statuette vendors toured England and Wales on pre-planned routes headed by a statuette maker.[68] These men were present in Birmingham during the period 1841 to 1881 and in common with their street musician compatriots, tended to live in Italian run lodging houses. In 1871, at 15 Chapel Street, Federic Gambogi, (spelt Gambrozi in the1881 census), "figure maker" from Tuscany, shared a house with Prospero Presidier, who was probably his vendor, since Gambogi was registered as the head of the household and Prospero as a lodger.[69] In 1881 eleven male lodgers who lived at Antonio Cassera's house, claimed to be image "makers", but it is more likely they were vendors he employed to sell the statuettes he made.[70]

The period which began in the late 1870s to the 1890s was one of change in relation to Italian itinerant workers in Britain. Sponza states that during these years, "there were... signs of a shift from the most traditional vagrant trades (organ-grinding, street entertaining, and statuette makers and vendors) to more settled habits".[71] A similar change became apparent from around the middle of the 1880s in Birmingham, for until then the majority of Italians were itinerant workers employed in street occupations, who lived temporarily in the Italian run lodging houses in the St. Bartholomew's area of the town.

Overall the Italian population in England and Wales grew throughout the century and London,[72] Liverpool and Manchester, in particular, showed steady

---

[67]King, *Geography*, p 177.
[68]Colpi, *Italian Factor*, p 38.
[69]In the same year Emilio Bonnecetti, a "figure maker", lived with his English wife and two Somerset born children at 21 Moor Street: *Census, 1871.*
[70]*Census, 1881.*
[71]Sponza, *Realities and Images*, p 56.
[72]No fewer than 2,041 Italians lived in London in 1861: Sponza, *Realities and Images*, p 19.

increases in the number of Italians who went to live there.[73] However, in Birmingham the Italian population remained small throughout the nineteenth century, and it is unlikely that more than two hundred lived there at any one time.[74] Being industrialised and wealthy, Birmingham had the potential to offer work to economic migrants, such as Italians; even so immigrants comprised a very small minority of the town's population during the nineteenth century.[75] The lack of research concerning immigrant communities during the nineteenth century creates difficulties when trying to establish the reasons why immigrants were more numerous in some towns and cities than others. The explanations why might relate to a lack of opportunities for employment, or possibly that the local population was intolerant of immigrants. What is clear is that in Birmingham, during the nineteenth century, working and living conditions were not conducive to Italian itinerant immigrants and the remainder of this chapter considers local attitudes towards Italians who lived there.

Social policy during the middle decades of the nineteenth century

For much of the century, the Birmingham authorities made attacks on, and persistent criticisms of, many crucial aspects of the itinerant Italian work- and life-style. Rapid urbanisation during the first half of the century was accompanied by overcrowding and an exacerbation of disease, noise and crime levels. The middle class was alarmed by these changes, and "feared anomie, anarchy and the collapse of the social order".[76] In an attempt to try to limit the effects of the shifts taking place within the demographic and social structure, various methods of public control were

---

[73]London offered a huge potential for work. Liverpool was a port of entry and embarkation for Italians enroute to America and Manchester and was also a town enroute to Liverpool from London where Italians might have decided to settle, either on their way to or from America/Liverpool.

[74]The parish registers for St. Chad's, St. Peter's and St. Michael's RC Chapels all show Italianate names during the nineteenth century that do not appear in any of the censuses.

[75]See this chapter, footnote 10.

[76]F.M.L. Thompson, "Regions and Communities", *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950,* Vol. 1, Cambridge U.P, 1990, p 57.

introduced, which included the regulation of lodging houses, the implementation of street worker regulations, and the attempted eradication of child street workers.

From the 1840s to the middle of the 1870s the local authorities were very concerned about lodging houses in Birmingham, and the reports of the watch committee and orders issued to the police illustrate keen interest in their regulation. The attention given to lodging houses was in part a consequence of the recent concerns over health and disease, as was the visit of Chadwick's health and sanitary inspectors in 1842, but was also a result of change within the hierarchy of the town. At this time, as this chapter has shown, the authorities believed that common lodging houses were dens of iniquity, vice and filth and, as such, were a poor reflection on the image of the town. E.P. Hennock's study of nineteenth century Birmingham demonstrates that, in the 1840s, image was all important to the newly appointed town councillors whose goal was to clean up the town, but at a cost that would not incur increases in the local rates.[77]

In 1851 the national Common Lodging Houses Act and the Birmingham Improvement Act[78]were introduced to better the health and cleanliness of the town. These laws, together with the appointment of an Inspector of Nuisances, heralded the beginning of a persistent local authority campaign aimed at tightening the control over lodging houses. Police Orders for the period 1848-1852 show how this campaign escalated from a collection of general information, ending with the implementation of lodging house registration procedures and frequent local government inspections.[79] In the 1850s new regulations followed rapidly after the watch committee received information alerting it to the large number of lodging houses in the town.[80] Alarmed,

---

[77]For a discussion about the intentions of B'ham's town councillors during the nineteenth century see: E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons*, Arnold, 1973.
[78]Under the 1851 Common Lodging House Act such premises had to be regularly inspected and, where necessary, landlords could be ordered to make general improvements to their properties.
[79]*Police Orders*, 31.5.1848, p 286. See also: *Police Orders*, 20.3.52; 18.5.52; 25.5.52; *B'ham Watch Committee Report*, 1852, Resolution 576.
[80]By early March of 1852 the police were given instructions by the watch committee

the authorities took steps to ensure that in the future lodging houses would be strictly controlled.[81]

In 1879, twenty-eight years after the common lodging house act was passed, the poor perceptions previously voiced about lodging houses were reiterated in a local newspaper report about Park Street. This was the area of the town where Chadwick's inspectors had identified Italian and Irish lodging houses in the 1840s. Although the article pointed out that there had been improvements since the 1850s, and lodging houses there were clean and orderly, Park Street was described as a "... low-lying part of the centre of the town (where) a large proportion of the floating population seems naturally to gravitate". The report also made it clear that it upheld the earlier poor reputation of Italian lodgers,[82] among whom it was claimed there were child abusers, since the majority of Italian females were too young to work in Britain.[83] The article stated that in an attempt to prevent the "wives" of Italian lodgers being used as prostitutes, the authorities had introduced special regulations which permitted lodging house keepers to ask Italian couples for proof of their marital status. The report

---

to list all names and addresses of known lodging houses in B'ham and by mid-May the Inspector of Nuisances and the Medical Sanitary Inspector stated that a quarter of the known lodging houses in B'ham had, so far, been inspected. Quite possibly as a result of mounting pressure coupled with the anxiety of the watch committee, within seven days of his report being made the Inspector stated that the number of common lodging houses had increased, but that he had now inspected around 80% of the total of "better class of lodging house". Between 18th May and 1st June the number of registered lodging houses in B'ham increased from 126 to 142, clearly indicating that their exact numbers were unknown at that time. As the inspector pointed out, these were the lodging houses of known proprietors; those in the less salubrious areas of the town remained unregistered. In an effort to remedy what had clearly been a shock to the authorities special lodging house registration books were ordered to be printed for the use of the police.

[81] 252 common lodging houses known to the police in the central wards of B'ham in 1842: *Report on the Labouring Poor of G. Britain, 1842.*

[82] "The Tramps Hotel", *B'ham Gazette*, 1879. I would like to thank Doreen Hopwood for bringing this article to my attention.

[83] Little evidence has been found to support the allegations that Italian women became prostitutes. Correspondence between the writer and L. Sponza, 10.8.00.

intimated that this regulation was avoided by Italians sending young "wives" to private houses to live where they would not be found by the police.[84]

The regulation of lodging houses in Birmingham had the potential to restrict the work and life-style of Italians in three ways. First, the campaign to reduce the number and generally "clean up" lodging houses was both important and long-standing in Birmingham, and such a campaign might have caused repercussions in relation to the number of Italians in the town. Earlier this chapter demonstrated the centrality of Italian lodging houses to the itinerant Italian community and furthermore, how a shortage might have affected their work contacts or perhaps simply, the opportunity for them to share Italian culture. Second, the poor local image of Italians in the 1840s was present in the 1870s. The effect of presenting Italians in derogatory terms, which stereotyped Italians as devious, may have meant that even if they were prepared to live in English lodging houses, local landlords could have been reluctant to allow them to stay in their accommodation. Finally, if word of these difficulties were carried by itinerant Italians to their native villages, then it is possible Italians might have been apprehensive about coming to Birmingham.[85]

Itinerant Italians in Birmingham faced a second potential obstacle, and this concerned their work as street sellers and entertainers. As already noted the majority of Italians who came to Birmingham were employed as musicians and statuette vendors. These Italians originated from the agricultural areas of northern Italy and therefore did not possess the appropriate employment or language skills[86] to enable them to find work in local industries. In addition to their lack of necessary skills were

---

[84]It seems this regulation did not apply to lodgers of other nationalities: "The Tramps Hotel", *B'ham Gazette,* 1879.

[85]It has been suggested that potential emigrants received information either, "through letters from emigrants who had already gone and from the experience of emigrants who had returned to Europe": D. Baines, *Emigration from Europe, 1815-1930,* Cambridge U. P, 1995, p 32.

[86]Language has been noted as one of the most important barriers against the employment of Italians in Britain which limited their work to that which "verbal communication was unnecessary", such as a musician because of its, "universal language": Foerester, *Italian Emigration,* p 205.

the protests made by trades unions against employers engaging foreign labour,[87] and although it is unlikely this was common in Birmingham during this period, it is possible that the "close relations, both economic and social between masters and men" may have deterred the employment of immigrants.[88]

From the middle of the nineteenth century, the Birmingham police and the watch committee worked closely together, not only for better control of lodging houses, but also of the streets. It is impossible to estimate how many street workers there were in Birmingham during that time but, judging from the reactions of the police, the watch committee and local shop owners, street workers appear to have been present throughout much of the town and in sufficient numbers to have been perceived as a threat. The thrust of the campaign seems to have come from local shop keepers and small business owners, who frequently petitioned the watch committee for the streets of Birmingham to be cleared. Perhaps these people feared loss of earnings, or were simply annoyed that they paid rates and street traders did not.

From about the middle of the 1840s a number of Birmingham's businessmen became town councillors and used their position to exert pressure on the police.[89] It is the view of Hennock that the character of Birmingham altered after its incorporation in 1837, and he demonstrates that the town councillors and the local elite not only became increasingly interested in promoting the image of Birmingham as 'respectable', but also in the greater regulation of its population through the police force. One of the

---

[87]Foerster suggests that Italians were informally barred in Britain from occupations where there was a trade union influence: Forester, *Italian Emigration*. See also: C. Hughes, *Lemon, Lime and Sarsaparilla: The Italian Community in S. Wales*, Siren Books, 1991; Colpi, *Italian Factor*, p 58.
L. Sponza has also confirmed that Trades Union opposition to immigrant labour was the most important reason why Italians were not engaged in local employment in Britain: Correspondence to writer, 10.8.00.

[88]A. Briggs, *History of B'ham*, Vol. 2, Oxford U.P, 1952, p 1.

[89]E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons*, p 27. See also F.M.L. Thompson, "The Rise of Suburbia", R.J.Morris and R. Rodger (eds), *The Victorian City, 1820-1914*, Longman,1993. Both writers acknowledge that within middle class society levels existed which acted against each other in order to guard personal interests.

concerns of the town council was to reduce the number of people working in street occupations.

Throughout the middle decades of the nineteenth century the view was commonly held that there was no distinction between begging and working on the streets. In a report made by the Charity Organisation Society it was stated, "[H]awkers and peddlers (sic) ... generally accompanied by women and children, are frequently only beggars in disguise, on pretence of selling wares, although their whole stock-in-trade is sometimes not sufficient to maintain the part for a day".[90] Prior to this report was another made by the Italian Benevolent Society, (IBS)[91] which stated that people engaged in street occupations produced nothing of value and were therefore beggars, and within this category they included Italian street performers and hawkers.[92]

In Birmingham, in the wealthy suburb of Edgbaston, 'beggars' were reported to have been present from at least 1850, and as a result plain-clothed policemen were deployed to the area on numerous occasions with orders to "lock them up". [93] Complaints about the nuisance of 'beggars' continued and in 1879 the Chief Superintendent of Police (CSP) asked that, "active measures should be taken to suppress this evil".[94] The calls to reduce the number of street traders quite clearly emanated from the wealthy members of Birmingham's society, who questioned the necessity for people to make a living in such a way. In 1882 the CSP requested the name and address of everyone arrested for 'begging', and the details of how they had been disposed of by the Justices.[95]

---

[90]Charity Organisation Society Report, *The Necessity for Repressing Vagrancy and Mendacity*, London, c1876.
[91]Middle class Italians comprised the Italian Benevolent Society, (IBS).
[92]The Annual Report in 1863 stated that begging was done by Italian boys in the streets. The IBS defined beggars as those who, "showed animals, played music or produced nothing of value." Quoted by Zucci, *Little Slaves*, p 102.
[93]*Police Orders*. See for example: 11.10.52; 7.3.53; 19.10.55; 20.3.56.
[94]*Police Order* 16.6.79.
[95]*Police Order* 23.1.83.

In addition to being "locked up" for perceived begging, costermongers and street entertainers could be charged with a number of other offences including obstruction, trading without a licence and making too much noise. During the 1840s and 1850s repeated orders were issued by the CSP to local police divisions. Even so, complaints continued to be received by the watch committee about the ineffectiveness of the police.[96] It seems possible that one reason for their lack of success was created by the CSP's own apparent ambivalence towards street traders and how best to deal with them, as is shown in this ambiguously worded order, issued to

"ALL DIVISIONS",

"HAWKERS. The Chief Inspector has noticed that Obstructions have accumulated in the streets recently. He directs that the Police will demand to see the License of Hawkers of articles (not their own making) and if not able to produce it to take them to the station where they may be locked up for hawking without a license. *(sic)* The Chief Supt. leaves great discretion to the Officers on duty as he does not wish to prevent any person earning a living, but obstruction in the Streets must be prevented."[97]

The 1851 Improvement Act contained a clause specifically to deal with street noise and in particular street musicians.[98] At this time, outside London, Birmingham was the only town to introduce street music licences, and trading without one could incur prosecution.[99] This offence was considered to have been so serious by the authorities that they imposed the fine of up to 40/- per day, which was an amount probably equivalent to two weeks good trading for an Italian organ-grinder.[100] From the early

---

[96]*Police Orders*. See for example: 15.12.79; 24.4.80; 9.1.83.
[97]*Police Orders*, June, 64 - Jan, 68, p 159.
[98]Public Nuisance Clause, 1851 B'ham Improvement Act. Resolution 454. The problem of street noise was considered to be so serious by the watch committee that placards were printed which explained the law to street musicians.
[99]P. Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, p 162.
[100]The widow of an organ-grinder stated her late husband had received c£1 per week earnings: *B'ham Post*, 2.5.1905, p 7. It is interesting to compare the fine for trading without a street licence with that levied against local factory owners for pollution offences, which was 5/- (25p), and to consider the probable differences between the incomes of these two perpetrators, as well as their potential influence in the town.

1850s to the 1880s businessmen continued to complain about the noise made by musicians, ballad singers and street hawkers outside their premises, [101] and between 1878 and 1884 on at least two occasions, the regulations dealing with street noise were updated and the fine increased.[102]

The third significant development of Birmingham's social policy that was likely to have impinged on Italians occurred from the 1860s and concerned widespread allegations that Italians were exploiters of children. From around the middle of the nineteenth century there became an increasing awareness of the terrible conditions endured by some working children, which was followed later in the century by laws aimed at protecting all vulnerable children in society. In the campaign leading up to these laws being passed some people seized an opportunity to wage personal crusades against real, perceived or potential child exploiters and, as a consequence the Italian padrone was embroiled.

Instrumental in spreading information about padroni were influential middle-class Italians belonging to the Italian Benevolent Society, (IBS) which was based in London. As discussed earlier, in the 1860s the IBS condemned Italian street workers as beggars, and it has been suggested that the IBS did this to try to disassociate itself from the poorer Italians, who were emigrating to Europe and Britain, in large numbers. The IBS accused the padroni of exploitation and blamed them for encouraging the migration of poor itinerant Italians whom they believed created a disreputable image of Italy.[103]

From the 1860s reports were printed by *The Times* about the cruel treatment which Italian street children received from padroni whom, it was rumoured, often beat and half-starved their wards. Undoubtedly cruelty did occur, but on what scale it is difficult to assess. In reality this system of recruitment, employment and use of child

---

[101] *Police Orders* and *Watch Committee Reports*. See for example: 1.2.52; 9.3.52; 3.1.84; 25.2.84.
[102] B'ham Bye-Law, Street Trading Nuisances, 6.8.78 and Consolidation Act, 1884.
[103] Zucci, *Little Slaves.*

labour differed little from the English apprentice system, which was equally vulnerable to exploitation by those inclined to do so. Even so, the British and Italian child protection laws were inadequate to prevent child cruelty, and the authorities publicised and condemned the treatment of children by 'foreigners'.[104] The campaign against padroni reached Birmingham early in the 1860s when a local newspaper claimed two padroni in the town controlled around 30 "organ boys", and that "not long ago" there were six such men.[105] The padroni were described as, "... stout, greasy (both in person and dress), tobacco perfumed and unhealthy looking ... rich and middle-aged (who) return home to buy land and to sit and smoke the pipe of peace under their own vine and their own fig-tree", and were said to have thrashed boys and half-starved them if their daily takings were less than they required.

A lack of supporting empirical evidence in this report undermines its reliability.[106] Nevertheless the potential damage to the reputation of Italians is quite obvious, since this article, which stereotyped middle-aged Italian males as untrustworthy, appeared in the popular *Birmingham Daily Gazette* newspaper. Furthermore, the report criticised organ-grinders as being "beggars" and suggested that young Italian boys, who were themselves exploited by their masters, preyed on young women who were duped into giving them their money.

After the circulation of these and similar rumours during the nineteenth century, this image of the padrone has been intractable and has even survived to recent times.[107] However, D. Green argues that, "in reality the padrone system was

---

[104]Laws were introduced in Italy to restrict child employment at home and abroad: Foerster, *Italian Emigration*, p 203.

[105]"The Night Side of B'ham. Organ Boys and Their Owners", *B'ham Gazette*, 3.12.63. I would like to thank Doreen Hopwood for drawing my attention to this article.

[106]The exact dates when the six Italian padroni lived in the town are not provided by the report, which was written in 1863. However, the census shows that in 1861 only five Italians lived in the central wards, and that these men were either descendants of the early settlers or men who lived in nuclear households.

[107]Chinn, "We All Come From 'round Sora", p 6; C. Upton, "The big trouble to hit Little Italy," *B'ham Daily Post*, 11.11.95.

probably more important in the minds of the middle-classes than it was a form of child employment".[108] For, whatever the role of the padrone during the middle of the nineteenth century, eventually laws were introduced in Britain and Italy to try to prevent Italian children working here. The British law did not however, outlaw the padrone system itself and they continued to come to Britain and, as Green has suggested, play an important function within the Italian community. Green has shown, "padroni probably acted either as recruiting agenc[ies] bringing over migrants from their own home area in Italy, or as a point of reception for those with the same regional background as themselves".[109]

There is not an abundance of newspaper articles and reports written about Italians in Birmingham, but those which were illustrate a negative attitude, and suggest that Italians were disliked. Given the very small number of Italians who came to Birmingham in the nineteenth century it is surprising so much attention was attracted by their presence, and moreso that they were considered sufficiently interesting to have been the topic of newspaper articles. These articles and reports indicate that middle class social observers regarded Italians with suspicion, and, as a consequence they were stereotyped as untrustworthy characters. This reputation, together with the persistent attacks on their life-style, at the very least would have made living and working in Birmingham difficult for Italians.

This chapter has provided information about those Italians who came to Birmingham during the period 1841-1881, but has not discussed the Italian population who lived there later in that century. The next chapter do just that, by examining the demographic development of the Italian population and the material conditions in the Italian Quarter, where they lived between 1891 and 1938.

---

108 Green, "Little Italy", p 5.
109 Green, "Little Italy", p 6.

Chapter 3 - DEMOGRAPHY AND SETTLEMENT IN THE ITALIAN QUARTER

The last chapter demonstrated that relatively few Italians lived in Birmingham during the nineteenth century. Those who did were typical of the majority of Italian immigrants in Britain at that time and can be broadly placed into the two categories of 'settled' and 'itinerants'. Yet, although both types of Italians were of working-class origin, socially and economically each group had different characteristics. The 'settled' Italians were craftsmen who originated from the Lombardy region and arrived in Birmingham from around the beginning of the nineteenth century. Their nuclear type family households were dispersed through the ward of St. Martin's, where they lived in private accommodation which often comprised a small workshop or businesses, in which family members were employed. One the other hand, the 'itinerant' Italians, who began to arrive in Britain, probably from the 1830s, comprised mostly street workers who lived in lodging houses which were initially situated in several of the central wards of Birmingham but, after the 1860s, most were concentrated in the St. Bartholomew's ward.[1] Only a very small number of Italian itinerant workers brought their families to Birmingham: the vast majority were males, who travelled in groups from Italian villages that were situated close together. These men remained in Birmingham only for the spring and summer months before they returned to their homes in northern Italy. Unlike the settled group of Italians, who have been traced in Birmingham throughout the nineteenth century, it has been almost impossible to find any itinerant workers in more than one census.

This chapter investigates a third category of working class Italian immigrant, the *St. Bartholomew Italians* (see Chapter 1), who despite experiencing difficulties in the city, began to move there to live from the end of the nineteenth century until the 1930s. Whilst the St. Bartholomew Italians shared similarities with both of the

---

[1]Bartholomew Street, Park Street and Bordesley Street all had Italian lodging houses located there in 1871, 1881 and 1891: *Dicennial Population Census of England and Wales, 1871, 1881 and 1891*, (hereafter *Census*).

previous two types of Italians who had lived in Birmingham, there were also significant differences, namely in relation to their region of origin, demography, work and the organisation of their community. Chapter three is primarily concerned with demography and the establishment of the Italian Quarter. In particular it will focus on the economic 'push and pull' factors which influenced the migration of the St. Bartholomew Italians; the patterns of immigration among St. Bartholomew Italians; the endogenous growth of the Quarter and finally, what living conditions were like in the St. Bartholomew's ward.

Demographic trends in the Italian population of England and Wales at the end of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries

During the period 1891-1911, the Italian population in England and Wales more than doubled from 9,909 to 20,389. Thereafter, until the 1930s it remained fairly static at approximately 19,000.[2] In addition to this population increase, from the end of the nineteenth century, structural change occurred as a consequence of the growing number of Italian females who migrated.[3]

Roughly coinciding with these national demographic changes was a small increase in the number of Italians who went to live in the Italian Quarter in Birmingham. However, unlike most previous Italians in the nineteenth century who stayed only temporarily and originated from northern regions of Italy, those who settled in Birmingham from the end of the century came from the southern-central regions: namely, the Liri Valley, and in particular the province of Frosinone.

Push and pull influences on migration

Most of the Italians who migrated during the last decade of the nineteenth and first decade of the twentieth centuries did so as a result of acute poverty. Many

---

[2] *Census, 1891-1931.*

[3] The percentage of Italian women in the Italian population of England and Wales was: 1861 = 15%; 1871 = 17%; 1881 = 18%; 1891 = 26%; 1901 = 24%; 1911 = 29%. Adapted from the *Census, 1861-1911.*

thousands of Italian migrants went to North and South America, Canada and Europe in the hope of improving their own lives, and those of their relatives by sending money home. Among these migrants were the St. Bartholomew Italians, many of whom had lived in rural areas prior to their migration: [4]

> "... those that came together (in the Italian Quarter) were in Southern Italy, where it's all farms, and things like that. Until my mother came to England, she was on a farm."[5]

This was a poor agricultural region, situated about one hundred miles north of Naples, where sharecropping accounted for 30% of the occupations of the total population,[6] and where absent landowners encouraged multiple family households to share and rent small pieces of land from them.[7] At the end of the nineteenth century further economic problems were created when the rural population rapidly increased and, combined with the system of patrilocality, this resulted in too many families having to work and rely on land too small to accommodate them. Their attempts at diversification were unsuccessful and remuneration remained insufficient to support their large families,[8] so Italians migrated to find work.[9]

Many of the St. Bartholomew Italians, who settled in the Quarter during the last decades of the nineteenth century, originated from the villages of Sora and Atina,

---

[4]For detailed information about the regions of origins of Italians who lived in B'ham see: C. Chinn, "We all come from 'round Sora: Italians in B'ham, c1821-1919", O. Ashton, R. Fyson and S. Roberts (eds), *The Duty of Discontent. Essays for Dorothy Thompson*, Mansell,1995; D. Hopwood and M. Dilloway, *Bella Brum, A History of B'ham's Italian Community* B'ham City Council, 1996, p 2.

[5]GLF2003.

[6]P. Tullio, *North of Naples,* Lilliput Press, 1994, p 200.

[7]D.I.Kertzer, D.P. Hogan and N. Kerweit, "Kinship Beyond the household in a nineteenth century Italian Town," *Continuity and Change*, 7, 1992, p 107.

[8]F.L. Galassi and J.S. Cohen, "The Economy of Tenancy in early twentieth century South Italy", *Economic History Review*, XLVII, 2, 1994, p 589.

[9]At this time Italians migrated to all parts of Europe and American in search of work: R.F. Foerster, *Italian Emigration of our times,* Arno Press, 1919. For a semi-fictional account of an early nineteenth century Italian migrant who went to America see, G. Talese, *Unto the sons,* Arrow Press, 1992.

in the Liri Valley and Caserta in Campania.[10] They were lured by the potential for obtaining employment in Britain and aided by the padrone system and chain migration.

> "My cousin Lesley's people, they come from very close to where my father and mother's were in Atina and Sora. Sora's very, very popular with the Italians that came, they seem to have come one after... into England."[11]

This common method of migration and settlement of family, kin and friends, who shared a similar culture, quite probably engendered a measure of loyalty and security between them. Indeed, previous research has demonstrated how numerous Italian communities in Britain were established around Italian regional alliances.[12] So important did Italians consider regional links that distrust existed of any Italians who did not share their dialect.[13] Having the 'right' dialect almost guaranteed immigrants some assistance when they arrived in their adopted home, and it was in this way that kinship ties were maintained in both the receiving country and in the birthplace of the immigrants. Italians fully exploited kin and family connections, and no matter how tenuous and distant these were they would be used to secure a contact in a receiving town.[14] Mrs. G's mother and father had no immediate relatives living in the Italian

---

[10]Respondents whose families originated from these areas, see for example: FVM3002, GLF2002, BEF3011, JGM3027, EBF2020 and LVM3028.
[11]EBF2001.
[12]Italians who went to live in South Wales came from Bardi: A.C. Hughes, *The Italian Community in S. Wales*, 1881-1945, Siren, 1991; Italians who settled in Bedford came from 3 regions of Italy: Moise, Montefalcione and Angelo; Italians living in Edinburgh originated from Frosinone, as did those in Glasgow, in addition to others from the Lucca Valley: T. Colpi, "The Italian Community in Glasgow With Special Reference to Spatial Development", *ATI*, Vol. 29, 1979. When Italians came from two or more regions it was usual for them to establish different settlements in their adoptive city.
[13]T. Colpi, *The Italian Factor*, Edinburgh, 1991, p 53.
[14]Some St. Bartholomew Italians had lived in Italian communities elsewhere in Britain before moving to B'ham. Charles Albericci transferred to the Italian Quarter with his father, brother and sisters from Leeds in 1912 and he then remained in the Italian Quarter until the 1930s. His parents had previously moved from the Holborn Italian community to Manchester, where he and his brother were born. It is possible that Italians, such as the Albericci family, who had no blood relatives or kin living in the Quarter, had links through the Italians in the communities from where they had moved.

Quarter, but did have a grandmother living in Sora. A large proportion of the St. Bartholomew Italians originated from that village and Mrs. G believes this was sufficient reason for her mother and father to move into the Quarter.[15] Similar narratives were not uncommon among respondents and demonstrate the importance of kin and family links in the settlement of immigrants abroad.[16] The potential for obtaining work added to the incentive of settling with familiar people and were important pull factors which attracted the St. Bartholomew Italians to settle in Birmingham.

The pattern of immigration among St. Bartholomew Italians, 1891-1938

It can be stated with confidence that Italian immigration to the Italian Quarter occurred during most of the period under investigation, and for the years 1891 to 1916, a reliable calculation of their numbers can be made. However, owing to a lack of evidence, it is not possible to even estimate how many Italians went to live there after 1916.

As previously stated, during the period 1891 to 1911 there was an unprecedented increase in the number of Italian immigrants in Britain. This increase was dramatic and short lived, for after 1911 until at least World War Two, the number of Italian immigrants entering Britain stagnated. This was partly as a result of the restricted entry to Britain imposed by the Aliens Act of 1905 which it was hoped, would restrict the number of poor immigrants coming to Britain.[17] The debates over

---

These details were taken from the unpublished memoirs of Charles Albericci, born 1898. By kind permission of Mrs. M. Dixon.

[15]LGF3006.

[16]Similarly the parents of Mrs.F were a young couple when they emigrated from Naples, in 1896 and at that time they had no relatives in the St. Bartholomew's parish. However, they may have had connections with the Neapolitan community in London which they could have used to secure settlement in B'ham, via the Neapolitans who were living in the Italian Quarter: WFF2008. For example Julietta Barlone went to B'ham around 1889 and she was born in Naples, as was Vincent Pontoni: *Aliens Registers.*

[17]The 1905 Aliens Act forbade the entry of immigrants to Britain if, "[h]e cannot show that he has in his possession or is in a position to obtain the means of decently

if, and when, Britain should introduce immigration quotas were protracted and discussions relating to the introduction of an immigration act lasted for over twenty years.[18] During these discussions numerous bitter arguments and much searching questioning occurred in both Houses,[19] and led to the eventual reduction of the scope of the Act, and legislation which was badly designed.[20]

Although the 1905 Act may have had some effect initially,[21] the general conclusion about its overall impact is that it was weak.[22]

---

supporting himself and his dependants; he is a lunatic or an idiot, or owing to any disease or infirmity appears likely to become a charge upon the rates or otherwise a detriment to the public; he has been sentenced in a foreign country": *Index of Public General Acts,* Aliens Act, 1905, Edw.VII, Vol. 13, Ch 13.

[18]Immigration debates began in the late 1880s in the House of Commons and were incite by the influx of East European Jews to Britain. The first Aliens Bill was introduced in the House of Lords by Lord Salisbury in 1892 and again in 1894. In its original form the Bill proposed outlawing the entry of immigrants who were destitute or anarchists. The question of restricting immigration was the subject of a Board of Trade Select Committee Enquiry in 1889, and a Royal Commission in 1903.

[19]Moral questions about who should and should not be allowed entry to Britain were raised at almost every debate about immigration controls in the Houses of Commons and Lords Britain had always been proud to have the reputation as a place of sanctuary for anyone politically threatened, whose life was in danger and for refugees. It was argued that economic circumstances alone should not be accepted as a claim for entry into Britain.

[20]Ships which carried fewer that 20 steerage passengers were not inspected by port authorities. Travelling as "steerage", was usually cheap, and was a method used mainly by poor immigrants.

[21]Italian immigration to Britain may have been discouraged by the 1905 Act, but in 1911 the annual report on alien immigration stated that, "Italian boys, ... are imported in fairly large numbers to engage in organ-grinding or itinerant trades such as ice-cream selling": *PP*, 5th Annual Report on Expulsion of Aliens, 1911, Vol. X, p 35-36. Even so, Sponza believes that the impact of the Act was minimal in relation to Italian immigration, since the number of street musicians and other itinerants had already begun to decline in Britain by 1906: Sponza, *Realities and Images*, p 13.

[22]Initially the number of immigrants entering Britain fell between 1907 and 1908. Furthermore, during the period 1906 to 1910, five thousand immigrants were refused entry because they were regarded by the authorities as being mentally ill: D. Cesarani, "An Alien Concept? The Continuity of Anti-alienism in British Society before 1940", *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol. II, No. 3, Nov.1992, p 32. Debates continue about the efficacy of the 1905 Act, but most would agree that this legislation was weak. A general view is that the Act had, "a muted measure of control, although it is probable that its psychological impact was greater than its provisions would suggest": C. Holmes, *John Bull's Island, Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971,*

Table 6. Estimated arrival of St. Bartholomew Italian immigrants in Britain

Arrival of St. Bartholomew Italians in Britain	% of the total of the St. Bartholomew Italians
Before 1892	19
Between 1892 - 1905	46
Between 1906 - 1910	11
Between 1911 - 1916	10
Unknown	14
Total	100

Table 6 shows four periods which have been chosen to demonstrate specific population changes. A comparison of the periods 1892 to 1905 and 1906 to 1916 indicates quite clearly that the migration of those Italians who lived in the Italian Quarter slowed down after the introduction of the 1905 Aliens Act.[23] However, the fact that immigration continued after 1905 demonstrates that the intention of the Act, which was to stop poor Italians and other immigrants coming to Britain, failed.[24] A major criticism of the Act was that it was possible to circumvent its regulations if the desire was sufficient, and with the aid of settled compatriots in Britain Italians continued to emigrate to the Italian Quarter after 1905.

It is highly likely that Pietro B had some assistance in his emigration to the Italian Quarter in 1915. On his arrival in Birmingham Pietro, aged forty-one, worked with his cousin who probably told the immigration authorities there was need for Pietro's help in his confectionery shop. Although Pietro's stated occupation was

---

Macmillan, 1988, p 67. For a similar viewpoint see: J.C. Bird, *Control of Enemy Aliens in G. Britain, 1914-1918*, Garland, 1986 and P. Panayi, *Immigration, Ethnicity and Racism in Britain*, 1815-1945, Manchester, U.P, 1994.

[23]The testimonies of many respondents also suggest that the majority of first generation of St. Bartholomew Italians arrived during the period 1892-1905. See: BEF3011, GLF2003, LVM3028, HZM2005.

[24]Evidence from St. Bartholomew Italians respondents suggest that their grandparents and parents had arrived in Britain in very poor financial circumstances.

"confectioner",[25] it is possible this was a ploy to gain entry to Britain, since he came from a region of Italy, Atina, where the major form of employment was agriculture. Furthermore, soon after his arrival Pietro left his cousin's employment and opened a fried fish shop.[26] Nevertheless, Pietro's stay in Britain was secure, since repatriation was unlikely as long as he remained financially independent and stayed out of trouble with the police. Although immigration might have procured a measure of security for those such as Pietro, there were also drawbacks. Pietro's grand-daughter explained the effect of migration on his family,

> "[H]e left my grandmother in Italy. There were three boys and a daughter. Then my father came here when he was twenty-one, and then his brother. My father sent for his brother ... and he lived with us for a long time. He was married, but he left his wife in Italy, same as his father left his wife ...."[27]

The weaknesses in the 1905 Act were quickly recognised, but supporters of immigration controls promoted the idea that it had been successful.[28] It was not until 1914 that legislation became more effective in preventing immigration to Britain when the Aliens Restrictions Act was passed, as a wartime precaution against subversives.

---

[25]The occupation "confectioner" is rather ambiguous in the context of Italians. Indeed, Sponza lumps together bakers and waiters under this term. A confectioner could have been a person who had specialised culinary skills in the art of sweet, cake and bread making or equally, it could have meant a manufacturer of ice-cream. In Britain, in 1915 there were numerous ice-cream makers, and so the grander title of confectioner may well have been adopted to impress the authorities and gain entry to Britain.

[26]*Aliens Registers* and testimony of respondent EBF2001.

[27]EBF2001

[28]Each year after the 1905 Act was passed a report was issued giving details about the immigration. In these reports the Aliens Act was defended on the grounds that each year since it was passed, "undesirable aliens" had been prevented from entering Britain. In 1911 the annual report stated that during that year, "the volume of ... immigration by the cross-channel services has ... considerably declined". However, the report had to concede that "alien traffic" continued to come to Britain via non-designated immigration ports, and furthermore, that steerage passengers were known to avoid the immigration officials, but were believed to amount to "only a handful of passengers": *PP*, 5th Annual Report on Expulsion of Aliens, 1911, Vol. X, pp 38-39.

The second peace-time immigration Act of the twentieth century was passed in 1919, but it was the additional clauses of 1920 that probably had the most impact on preventing Italian immigration to Britain.[29] This Act was far more efficient than the one passed in 1905, because it forbade entry into Britain anyone without a work permit, and set a precedent for immigration restrictions which continued until at least 1971.[30] The Act was passed, partly, in response to high, post-war unemployment, although in reality immigrants formed only a very small proportion of the total workforce and presented no serious threat to British labour. This legislation can therefore be seen as a symbol of the government's good intentions and, to a degree, probably masked its impotence to relieve the high unemployment which was creating growing discontent among British workers.

The 1920 Act allowed a trickle of immigrants to enter Britain, but only if they complied with the strict conditions of employment the law stipulated.

> "You see, you had to come with a job, you see, because otherwise, if you didn't come with a job ... Well the firm could keep you on as long as they gotta work, but when they didn't have work, you gotta go back."[31]

This Italian born respondent came to Birmingham in 1929 as a terrazzo floor layer, because these workers were relatively rare in Britain. The 1920 Act stated that any employer wishing to employ foreign labour, such as terrazzo workers, had first to apply to the labour exchange, which would contact skilled men in Italy. Workers were then given British work permits but only for the duration of the contract their

---

[29]This Act extended the emergency regulations and powers placed on immigrants during World War One, and was intended to control subversive activities, and curtail foreign interest in British shipping. Orders in Council were additional clauses to the Act added in 1920 which stipulated the regulations under which immigrants were allowed to come to Britain to work: *Index of General Public Acts*, Aliens Restrictions (Amendment) Act, 1919, Vol. X, pp 427-434.

[30]The Act was enabled through the Restrictions of Aliens Act 1914. Initially, restrictions on the movement of immigrants had been applied as emergency measures during the war, but continued afterwards.

[31]MSM1013.

employers had secured. The craft of terrazzo was jealously guarded by Italians, most of whom came from just a few villages in northern Italy. These men were reluctant to pass on their skill to anyone who did not originate from their region, in the full realisation that such tactics would procure their future employment:

> " ... skilled, skilled. Only skills. (sic) They came with the skill, otherwise they wouldn't have come in. It's not likea today, in that er, any Tom-Dick-Harry comin' in an' get a job. If you 'ada no work, you 'ad to go back!"[32]

Becoming less fluent in English, the anger and resentment he felt became more evident in the testimony of this respondent as he recalled the personal effect British immigration laws had on his family. The government was very strict and did not allow immigrants to enter Britain who did not have a work permit. Mr. S told how his brother, who was on holiday in Britain in 1934, was suspected of working because a pair of overalls were found in his luggage.

> "See, the Home Office said he was working, and gave him forty-eight hours to leave the country. Forty-eight hours. Out! Two detectives picked him up in New Street, (and took him) as far as London. London Victoria, as far as Dover, another two detectives, and with the boat (he) left."[33]

Demographic structure and endogenous growth within the St. Bartholomew Italian population

The St. Bartholomew Italians began to arrive from the middle of the 1880s, in the area that was later to become known as the Italian Quarter. Yet, although these Italians were quite different from those who lived in Birmingham earlier in the nineteenth century, during the initial years of their settlement in the Quarter there were few discernible indications of this. Originally the St. Bartholomew Italians settled in numbers that were not dissimilar to the itinerant Italians earlier in the century. Indeed,

---

[32] *Ibid.*
[33] *Ibid.*

between 1881 and 1891 there was an increase of only twenty Italians in the Quarter. It was only during the following twenty-five years, that their population increased more significantly to approximately two hundred and twelve, which was more than double the number that had lived there in 1891.[34]

However, differences quickly became apparent in the demographic structure and pattern of settlement among the St. Bartholomew Italian population who began to show distinctive signs of their intended long-term stay, soon after their arrival. During the 1880s a small number of young Italian families settled in the St. Bartholomew's parish. The Delebra family is one example: this Italian born couple moved to live in Bartholomew Street, sometime between 1885 and 1888 and established a nuclear family household. There is no way of knowing how long the Delebras had been in Britain, but their oldest son was born in Wolverhampton in 1885, and between then and 1888 they moved to Birmingham, where they had another son and a daughter.[35] The settlement of couples and families, such as the Delebras, marks a significant shift in life-style among Italians in Birmingham, as previously, the Italian population in the St. Bartholomew's ward had comprised mostly males, who were temporary visitors and lived in lodging houses.

It was for a number of reasons that the itinerant life-style among Italians began to decline at the end of the nineteenth century. Partly responsible for this alteration were changes within the occupational structure of Italians in Britain as they began to reject street music as an occupation and establish themselves in catering industries, such as ice-cream manufacturing and selling. At this time, in Birmingham fewer Italians migrated on an annual basis, and instead more families began to settle there permanently.[36] In conjunction with the decline in itinerancy was a reduction in the number of Italian-run lodging houses in Birmingham. In 1881 there had been five in the St. Bartholomew's parish, but by 1891 three of these had become nuclear family

---

[34]This number does not include anyone aged 18 years and under.
[35]*Census, 1891.*
[36]Sponza, *Realities and Images,* pp 58-59.

households. This downward trend in the number of Italian lodging houses continued in the following years, and in 1916 there were only four in the whole of Birmingham.[37]

The inclination of St. Bartholomew Italians towards a more settled family life-style increased during the years that followed. In 1891 there had been a total of eighteen Italian families living within a few streets of each other in the St. Bartholomew's parish[38] but, by 1916, there were sixty-six.[39] Furthermore, Italians began to converge on one area of the city, and a comparison between the population in 1891and 1916 demonstrates that 38% of Italians remained in the St. Bartholomew's parish. Although the St. Bartholomew Italians were less transient than their predecessors, there continued to be a large number of lodgers within their population, but unlike earlier Italian lodgers in Birmingham, these tended to be organised in family groups and the majority lived in multiple family households.

For the first time during the nineteenth century, in 1891, a small number of unmarried Italian women were recorded in the Birmingham census, working as organ-grinders and living among other female family members, presumably siblings, in a lodging house in Bartholomew Street.[40] Although the number of single women, or indeed, Italian women of any status, was never high in Birmingham, their presence from the end of the nineteenth century was significant and heralded the beginning of what would eventually become a consolidated community.[41] How common it was for

---

[37]The two Italian run lodging houses were located in Bartholomew Street: *Aliens Registers.*

[38]*Census, 1891.*

[39]*Aliens Registers.*

[40]The lodging house was run by Italian Gatezza (sic) Delicatto, at 37, Bartholomew Street: *Census, 1891.*

[41]Sponza, *Realities and Images,* p 58. In B'ham the number of Italian women was almost negligible in 1881 but by 1891 they formed around 34% of the Italian population in the city, and in 1916 their percentage increased to 37%. Although these figures are very low the percentage of Italian women appears to have been a little higher in B'ham than the national average of 30%. However, the B'ham figures are slightly misleading since the figures for 1916 have been calculated from the Aliens Registers in which, as it has already been established, the Italian males who had joined

single women to emigrate to Birmingham is unclear. However, during this period an increasing number of Italian females settled in Britain.[42]

During the last decades of the nineteenth century it became common for young Italians to emigrate to Birmingham. Mrs. S's grandmother was sixteen when she and her sister came to Birmingham to work as musicians. It was in the Italian Quarter that her grandparents met and, in 1894, they married. The couple remained in the Quarter with their children and grandchildren until the 1930s.[43] Not all St. Bartholomew Italians were single when they arrived in the Quarter. Mrs. G's grandparents arrived in Birmingham sometime around 1882 after their marriage in Italy, and Mrs. G's mother was born in Birmingham, in either 1895 or 6,

> "but her brothers [4 of them] were older than her ... all of 'em born in Birmingham."[44]

Other Italian married couples brought their infants and young children with them. Mrs. L's brother,

> "was twelve months old when they came ... she [her mother] had three children [who were born] in Italy, and then she came to Birmingham, and she had Bet and me."[45]

This mother and father, from Sora, sailed from Naples with their two young daughters and infant son, and came directly to the parish of St. Bartholomew's, in 1894, but their family was not complete until ten years later, in 1904.[46]

During the last couple of decades of the nineteenth century the Italian Quarter was established and a community, comprising fairly young Italians with many children,

---

the army would not have been registered. Without their inclusion in the population figures the percentage number of women would appear higher.

[42]Sponza, *Realities and Images*, p 58.

[43]GSF3017.

[44] LGF3006.

[45] GLF2003.

[46]Other respondents told similar stories about the arrival in the Quarter of their grandparents and parents. See: WFF2008, EBF2001, HZM2005.

developed from the initial settlement of a few Italians. Living in families with an Italian male head of household in 1891 were twenty-eight children, aged eighteen years and under; however, during the following twenty-five, years children within the St. Bartholomew Italian population increased to two hundred and ten.[47]

Endogenous growth continued throughout the period under investigation and a wide age structure existed in the Quarter. In 1916 73% of the adult St. Bartholomew Italians were aged between twenty-seven and fifty-six years, and fewer than 6%, of the total population were older than sixty years. Of the adult women living there, 72% were aged under forty-six years and therefore probably capable of having further children.

Table 7. Fertility of St. Bartholomew Italians, 1899-1935

Respondent	(a) Years of fertility in each family	(b) Total no. of children in each family	(c) No. of children 14 years and under in 1925	(d) No. of children 14 years and under in 1935
EBF2001	1926-1930	2	0	2
FVM3002	1913-1925	6	6	3
GLF2003	1892-1904	5	2	0
VIF2004	1914-1918	2	2	0
HZM2005	1910-1926	7	5	3
LGM3006	1920-1930	8	4	7
LPM3007	1921-1931	5	3	5
WFF2008	1910-1923	6	6	4
CAM3010	1914-1936	5	4	4
BEF3011	1919-1936	8	3	7
MDF3012	1921-1939	11	3	9
GSF3017	1916-1947	15	0	5
NHF3018	1920-1940	11	3	8
EBF2020	1899-1917	5	2	0
FOF2021	1926-1928	2	0	2
IIPF2023	1922-1924	2	0	2
JGM3027	1926-1928	2	0	2
	Total	102	43	63
	Average No. of children per family	5.6		
		No. of families with children aged 14 years and under	12	14

[47]This figure was double the number of children in 1881.

Table 7 shows the rate of fertility of seventeen St. Bartholomew Italian families compiled from information given by respondents.[48] Column (b) gives the total number of children who survived their first year who were born to each of these families during the period under investigation, from which an average of 5.6 children per family has been calculated. This figure is almost double the average number of children in working-class families in Britain during approximately the same period.[49] Further calculations have been made in columns (c) and (d) which provide the number of children aged fourteen years in 1925 and 1935 respectively. This information shows that, from at least the middle of the 1920s, the majority of these seventeen families had children who were below the school leaving age.

Endogamy within the St. Bartholomew Italian population

As already stated, there was a large discrepancy between the number of Italian men and women within the St. Bartholomew Italian population, which meant that non-endogamous marriages were inevitable. The figures for Table 8 have been collated from the marriage registers of St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church.[50] Unfortunately, entire registers for the years 1899 to 1908, and part of the 1909 registers are missing, yet despite this, a good indication of the marriage trends can be identified. Between 1890 and 1938 these registers recorded one hundred and fifty-three marriages involving at least one Italian partner.[51]

---

[48]Some St. Bartholomew Italian families were not complete until after 1938. The calculations shown in Table 7 have been made only for the period 1891-1938, and any children born after 1938 have not been included in the calculations shown in columns (c) and (d), but have been included in the calculation of the average family size for the whole period, shown in column (b).

[49]It has been estimated that in 1915, on average, families had fewer than 2.5 children and during the 1920s they had "barely" two: J. Benson, *Working Class in Britain, 1850-1939*, Longman, 1989, p 99.

[50]St. Michael's RC church was used by the majority of St. Bartholomew Italians during the period under investigation.

[51]Anyone with an Italianate family name is deemed to have been Italian for the purpose of this exercise.

Table 8. Endogamy within the St. Bartholomew Italian population, 1890-1938[52]

	The % of endogamous marriages recorded in the St. Michael's RC church registers
1890-1899	58
1900-1909	not available
1910-1919	73
1920-1929	37
1930-1938	37

The missing marriage register makes it difficult to state with absolute confidence, but it is probable that for the first three decades of their settlement in the Italian Quarter more than half of the St. Bartholomew Italians married endogamously.[53] Table 8 indicates that it was not until the 1920s that the majority of marriages there were non-endogamous. This trend coincided roughly with the period when the youngest members of the second generation of St. Bartholomew Italians were reaching marriageable age and the restrictions on immigration had been introduced. Therefore, one explanation for the upward trend in non-endogamy was that immigration to the Quarter was slowing down.

As it will be demonstrated, the St. Bartholomew Italians viewed marriage and in particular endogamy, as not only a means of increasing their population, but also a means of stabilising and keeping together their community. Deliberately restrictive cultural practices were responsible for the high rate of endogamy among Italians in the Quarter, and these were upheld by many of the first and second generations of St. Bartholomew Italians. Like many Italians living elsewhere in Britain,[54] the St. Bartholomew Italians often went to considerable lengths to secure Italian partners.

---

[52]St. Michael's RC Parish Church Marriage Registers, 1890-1938.
[53]St.Michael's RC Church Baptism Registers for this period indicate that very few parents of the babies recorded were not both Italian.
[54]Colpi, *Italian Factor*, p 78.

However, restrictions on immigration limited the number of eligible Italian men and women in Britain and this made endogamy difficult. As a result, resident Italians either had to choose between marrying non-endogamously, or trying to find suitors from other Italian communities in Britain, or back home in Italy. Family members often encouraged eligible men and women to become partners. Mrs. L tried to end the relationship with her Italian fiancé, on several occasions during their courtship, but unknown to her, each time she did, her aunt arranged for them to meet.[55] Family intervention in choosing marriage partners was not uncommon among Italians, and some marriages were organised despite the absence of love or romance. Mrs. H's parents were introduced to each other shortly after the end of World War One:

> "I think they arranged the marriages then, didn't they? All I know is he [father] went to Walsall and mom was out with the potatoes, [selling baked potatoes] and he went there, in his uniform, and they met up, and that's it. They was married just after."[56]

Arranged marriages served to preserve Italian culture and it was common for couples from the same region of origin to marry, thereby strengthening family and kin bonds, in Italy and Britain.

The problem of not being able to find a suitable spouse was not confined to the young, but was also experienced by bereaved Italians wishing to remarry. In these circumstances St. Bartholomew Italians would either return home to their village in Italy, or go to other Italian communities in Britain and bring their new spouse to the Quarter. During the late 1920s, and whilst in his early 40s, Mrs. F's father became a widower with five young children. Unable, or unwilling to raise his children alone, he temporarily moved his family to live with the Italian community in Manchester and, after a year, returned to the Italian Quarter with his new wife.[57]

---

[55]MLF2014.
[56]NHF3018.
[57]WFF2008. See also testimonies of EBF2001 and HZM2005.

The Italian Quarter continued to grow as the second and third generations were born, matured and married. There was a tendency for St. Bartholomew Italians to remain in the Quarter after they were married, even if their spouse originated from elsewhere. In 1917 Mrs. E's Italian born father married an English woman who came from the nearby parish of Aston, and they went to live with his parents in Duddeston Row.[58] Mr. A also married an English woman, in 1934, and much to the disappointment of his in-laws, took his bride to live in Bartholomew Street.[59]

This chapter has so far discussed the growth and structure of the St. Bartholomew Italian population, and the reasons why and how they came to live in that ward. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the housing and health conditions in the Quarter, using evidence provided by middle-class observers and the narratives of \St. Bartholomew Italians.

The first generation of St. Bartholomew Italians moved to live in Birmingham in order to try to improve their lives, and it can be imagined how leaving a rural area and a climate that was hot and sunny to live in a place which was intensely industrialised, polluted and dank, would have been a huge culture shock. Added to the wrench of leaving family, friends and familiarity, may have been the disappointment of the realities of Birmingham, for material conditions in the St. Bartholomew's ward were among the worst in Birmingham, and despite the claim that the city was the best governed in the world, slums, poverty and high mortality were suffered by a large proportion of its inhabitants.[60] The poor conditions experienced by the people who lived there were not unrecognised. Numerous local government reports and

---

[58]BEF3011.
[59]CAM2010.
[60]E. Hopkins, *B'ham, the First Manufacturing Town in the World, 1760-1840*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989, p 62.

independent surveys drew the attention of the public and some remedial measures were attempted; however, their intent and success were limited.[61]

Housing

The causes of overcrowding in the St. Bartholomew's ward were discussed in Chapter 1, and as previously stated, the dire conditions there were not unnoticed by the local authorities. From 1895 the annual Medical Officer of Health reports consistently described the living conditions in that ward as cramped and insanitary. In 1904 the MOH, Dr. John Robertson, reported that for the families who inhabited the St. Bartholomew's ward, "the general condition of gloom and dirt (made) life far from what it ought to be."[62] Streets such as Fox Street, Buck Street, Bartholomew Street and Park Street were noted for their warren like nature, and the houses there located in ill-lit, small and dangerous alleys.[63] Between 51 and 76% of houses in this area were of the back-to-back type, built in courtyards which typically contained fourteen houses.[64]

> "The house I remember there was one room downstairs and a little pantry, that they'd got a curtain over. Then, upstairs there was two bedrooms, (a bedroom and an attic), and I was born in the attic."[65]

This house is described as it was during the 1920s, and although of the back-to-back type, it did have running water. However, almost 60,000 houses in the city had no sink, drains or inside toilet which suggests that Birmingham fell far short of housing

---

[61]Some of the houses in the area were upgraded during the period, when running water was installed. There was also an attempt to improve health education in the St.Bartholomew's ward through the introduction of health visitors.
[62]*MOH Report, 1904,* p 13.
[63]Cuming-Walters, "Scenes in Slumland", *B'ham Daily Gazette,* 1901.
[64]*MOH Report, 1913.*
[65]LGF3006. It has been estimated that there were 40,000 similar back-to-back houses in Birmingham similar to the one in Bartholomew Street being described here by a St. Bartholomew Italian: P. Thompson, *The Edwardians. The Remaking of British Society,* Routledge, 1992, p 19.

conditions found elsewhere in England's larger towns, during the initial decades of the twentieth century.[66]

Almost forty years after the 1895 MOH report in which the insanitary living conditions in the area were identified, another survey was carried out at the request of the Birmingham Citizen's Committee into housing conditions in the central wards of Birmingham which revealed that very few improvements had been made.[67] Of the 108 houses in the St. Bartholomew's ward visited by Janet Rushbrooke, the surveyor for the enquiry, almost 41% were found to have poor ventilation, and over a quarter were damp.[68] The survey discovered that up to one-fifth of the houses in the area remained unconnected to the mains, and it was the recommendation of the surveyor that houses in the St. Bartholomew's area should be demolished and the area allowed to become completely industrialised.

The insanitary conditions of houses in the St. Bartholomew's area were vividly remembered by the majority of respondents. Mr. P's unprompted description about having to use communal toilets gave more than a hint of his indignation:

> "Toilets! There was three toilets up the yard and I think there was three families to each toilet. And I used to dread going up in the dark. Oh yea. You went up the yard and round the back, and it was all dark, y'know. Oh I used to dread it! I s'pose really it's the bad old days really, not the good old days. But things y'did stick in your mind."[69]

According to Mr. P, as many as forty-five people had to share these toilets. However, in reality, in that particular yard there had been four toilets which were shared by six

---

[66]It has been suggested that, "[B]y 1914 nearly every house in the country had its own supply of piped water, and most houses in the larger English towns also had their own water closet": Benson, *The Working Class in Britain*, p 76.
[67]*B'ham's Blackspots: Report on the survey of Housing Conditions in B'ham*, 1934.
[68]*B'ham's Blackspots*, pp 13, 6, 19.
[69]NPM3009

families, and in all thirty-six people.[70] Even so, the fact that these conditions were exaggerated by Mr. P illustrates the lasting impression that having to share the toilets had on him, and his reaction has an even greater significance given the number of times he would have carried out this most ordinary function.[71]

In addition to the toilets these houses had a washing area that was also communal and which was popularly known as the 'brew'ouse':

> "and that'd got a copper (boiler) in with a fire underneath and a big what, it'd be 8 or 9 foot long concrete sink, where the taps were, where they used to boil all the water in the copper to wash the clothes in, and all that, you see. That was how you got your water, there was no water in the houses. You'd only got sinks in the house. You used to fetch your water in buckets, and if you wanted hot water, you boiled it. And in the winter sometimes, if you was in a hurry to do things and there was somebody in the sink, like as we got older, 'round about eleven and twelve, we used to go under the tap and wash ourselves. Stripped to the waist sometimes in the winter. These were the things they done in those days."[72]

For some families the brewhouse was also used as a bathroom where children would be bathed, two at a time, in the unlit copper. Adults bathed in front of the scullery fire in a portable galvanised tub using hot water from the boiler in the brewhouse.[73] Although an estimated one million houses in England and Wales had electricity in the 1920s,[74] the majority of houses in St. Bartholomew's did not, and Mrs. B remembered vividly the gas mantles being lit by her mother.[75]

---

[70]Mr. P's brother, LPM3007, also spoke about the toilet facilities where they had lived. Overall, his brother proved to be a more reliable respondent about quantitative information. However far more qualitative information was provided by NPM3009.
[71]Psychologist W. Brewer has shown that the more ordinary an event is and the more often an event occurs, the less likely it will be remembered in old age. Cited by V. Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History,* Sage,1984, p 22.
[72]NPM3009.
[73]Verbal information given to writer by Mr. L.J. Volante.
[74]Thompson, *The Edwardians,* p 269.
[75]EBF2001.

Even so, not all of the houses in St. Bartholomew's parish were of the back-to back type. The parish also had some quite large houses in which a small percentage of the St. Bartholomew Italian families lived.

> "Well, I suppose it was considered a big house. It had two separate staircases, so it must have been. We never used the second one, I think we were frightened to go up the back staircase. But dad had his workshop at the front and, at the back, there was just a small room that would be a living room, with a fireplace and it was the second stair case that went off there. It was a three storey house. ... the second floor, we had rather a big sitting room on the corner, and then there were the bedrooms. There was two bedrooms on that floor, one big bedroom above where my brothers slept, and then, ... there was one big room that stretched right across the house..."[76]

Interpretation of the past is of course open to conscious and subconscious abuse, and therefore a danger exists that childhood memories might become nostalgic and larger than life, or alternatively deliberately reviled. However, this respondent, who readily admitted seeing the past "through rose-tinted glasses", was quite modest and genuinely surprised as she recalled the details about her home.

For the entire period under investigation, most houses in St. Bartholomew's parish were in an appalling condition. Contemporary MOH and housing reports indicated clearly that the parish suffered from acute neglect, and more recent research suggests that Birmingham, "had the unhealthiest housing of any large English city in 1914".[77] Despite these conditions it was here that Italians congregated perhaps partly because the cost of renting these houseś was comparatively cheap.

House rents in the St. Bartholomew's area

Obtaining information about rents during this period is difficult, due mainly to the fact that the overwhelming majority of rented accommodation was owned by

---

[76]WFF2008. See also HZM2005.
[77]Thompson, *The Edwardians*, p 19.

private landlords.[78] In 1901 houses in the St. Bartholomew's ward were reported to have been rented for between 4/- and 6/- a week.[79] These figures might be a little inflated since they were quoted by the *Daily Gazette* journalist, J. Cuming-Walters, who was a rather sensationalist writer for that period. Other information suggests that average rents were slightly lower, at around 3/6 per week, and that they remained fairly consistent throughout the period 1897 to 1912.[80] Charles Albericci confidently recalled that, in 1912, he and his family,

> " moved into a house at 45 Banbury Street, Birmingham, rent was 3/6 (17.5p) a week, with a private landlord."[81]

By 1914 the average weekly rent for houses in the area appears to have risen to 4/2d, which despite the increase, still meant they were 6d (2.5p) cheaper than the average weekly rent being charged in Birmingham at that time.[82] During the following years rents in the area continued to increase and, at the end of the 1930s, the average rent was approximately 6/- (30p) per week, whilst the average weekly rent in Birmingham was around 7/4d (37p).[83] This evidence suggests that the average weekly rents in the St. Bartholomew's ward were cheap in comparison with Birmingham, generally. However, although the cost of rent was low and therefore financially beneficial, tenants paid dearly in other ways.

Health in the St. Bartholomew's parish

In 1901 a report written by the Special Health Committee stated: "[T]here is a good deal of old property which, partly from the neglect of landlords, and partly from

---

[78] Benson, *Working Class in Britain,* p 72.
[79] Cuming-Walters, "Scenes in Slumland", p 7.
[80] *Report of the Health Committee Special Meeting of the Council, 1901*, p 23.
[81] Unpublished memoirs of Charles Albericci, p 2.
[82] *Corporation of B'ham. Report of the Special Housing Enquiry, 1913-14.*
[83] *When we build again.* Bournville Trust Research Publication,1941. Figures for the average weekly rent in B'ham have been calculated from statistics given in the Bournville Report. The average weekly rent paid in Britain in 1935-6 was 6/- (30p): Benson, *Working Class in Britain,* p 81.

the untidy habits of tenants, require[s] almost constant attention from the Health Department". This report reiterated previous concerns about the housing conditions and their influence on health in the area, and recommended, "the entire clearance of some of the more old, insanitary and crowded areas", namely, St. Mary's, St. Bartholomew's and St. Stephen's, "if any great improvement" was to be achieved in reducing high death rates.[84]

Analysis of the mortality figures for individual wards within Birmingham show that St. Bartholomew's were consistently among the highest recorded.[85] Although general mortality in Birmingham decreased during the period 1895 to 1938, in the St. Bartholomew's ward it remained higher than the average recorded in the city. MOH reports also indicate that infant mortality in that ward exceeded the average for Birmingham and that the causes were diphtheria, typhoid, diarrhoea and enteritis.[86]

Respondents testify to the regularity of child deaths in the Quarter and, of all of the families who were represented in the sample of St. Bartholomew Italians, a quarter experienced the sadness of death of at least one child during the 1920s and 1930s.[87]

> "Well, in those days babies were always dying. It isn't like now. I mean measles, they used to die like anything, but you don't hear about it now do you?"[88]

Although the highest incidents of mortality were found in areas such as St. Bartholomew's, where poor housing and overcrowding existed, not everyone agreed that these conditions were responsible for causing ill-health and death. In 1914, Dr. John Robertson laid much of the blame on the "class of occupant", of whom he said,

---

[84]*Report of the Health Committee Special Meeting of the Council, 1901.*
[85]*MOH Reports, 1904 to 1938.*
[86]Figures based on *MOH Reports,* 1904, 1920, 1930 and 1938 and *City of B'ham Abstracts, 1931-1954.*
[87]See for example: CAM3010; FVM3002 and LPM3007.
[88]GLF2003. See also FOF3021 for an account of the long-term problems caused by measles among St. Bartholomew Italians.

"many ... are inefficient, and it is unfair to say that the back-to-back house is the main cause of the high mortality, or the high rate of sickness of the occupants".[89] However, Dr. Robertson was not entirely against "slum dwellers", and in 1918 he disagreed with the view that people in slums did not want to improve their lot, and stated that were they given the opportunity to do so, many would live decently. Despite the opinion of Dr. Robertson, the rehousing of occupants was slow, due partly to ignorance about the causes of ill-health, but also because the local authorities were reluctant to introduce a programme of council house building.[90]

Poverty in the St. Bartholomew's area

Back-to-back houses were inhabited by the poor of the central wards of Birmingham. A Special Report about the area, written in 1904 stated that many of the inhabitants of the central wards were employed as, "street hawkers, barrowmen ... all more or less with poor incomes. It is ... impossible for a man living in the centre of the City, and employed as a labourer at the standard rate of wages, to keep a wife and family of three children without being in poverty".[91] This report was made at the time when the first generation of St. Bartholomew Italians were settling into the area. Ten years later another enquiry into the area found that poverty continued to be widespread, and it is clear from the report, that the occupants of slum houses were often blamed for the poor conditions in which they lived, even though the causes of poverty were not fully understood.[92] The Chief Housing Inspector, who gave evidence at the Special Housing Report enquiry held in 1914, categorised inhabitants

---

[89] *Corporation of B'ham, Report of the Special Housing Enquiry 1913-14*, p 14.
[90] *MOH Report, 1918*, p 86. In 1901 recommendations had been made that the council provide low rent dwellings for the poorest but council had not approved this: *Report of the Health Committee, Special Meeting of the Council*, 1901, p 23.
[91] *MOH, Special Report on the Floodgate Street Area, 1904*, pp 14-16.
[92] Some other reports, such as: S. Rowntree's, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, London, 1902, indicated that the causes of poverty were far more complicated than many realised. Even so, evidence that the B'ham authorities were sympathetic towards the poor was not often apparent. .

in the area into three groups: two of these were the 'undeserving poor' who he believed were wholly responsible for their predicament. The report regarded people who lived in back-to-back houses, which were rented for between 3/6d (17.5p) and 4/- (20p) per week, such as the St. Bartholomew Italians, as, "careless, indolent tenants, who, although in regular employment, is (sic) content to live in dirt and idleness, due in many circumstances to the improvidence of the women folk".[93]

Conclusion

This chapter has described the settlement pattern and demographic structure of the third category of Italian who lived in Birmingham, the St. Bartholomew Italians, who, from around the 1880s, lived in an area of the city called the Italian Quarter. They were unlike previous compatriots who visited Birmingham, for these Italians remained in the city, and lived in nuclear family households. As a result of chain migration, between c1880 and 1905, their population gradually increased, thereafter it grew endogenously as the first generation of immigrants became settled and had families. Later, during the 1920s and 1930s, the second and third generations had families of their own, and many of them remained in the Italian Quarter.

Throughout the period 1891 to 1938, the St Bartholomew's ward, where the Italian Quarter located, was overcrowded and insanitary, and the majority of houses there lacked the most basic conveniences necessary to secure reasonable comfort and health. Inhabitants suffered disease which led to death, and morbidity and mortality rates in St. Bartholomew's ward were consistently higher than the average for Birmingham.

The St. Bartholomew Italians left Italy as a result of poverty, as did many who moved to live in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century. Similar patterns of settlement to those of the St. Bartholomew Italians occurred among Italians located

---

[93]Testimony of Mr. J.E. Abrahams, Chief Housing Inspector to the B'ham Corporation: *Special Housing Report, 1913-4*, pp 31-2.

elsewhere in Britain. It is easy to understand how the lure of economic and social pull factors, such as employment as street entertainers, and settlement among people from a similar region of origin, could have encouraged poor Italians to migrate. However, it is difficult to know why they remained in the area for so long given the dire conditions which surrounded them. Understanding the reasons for the sustainment of this Italian community is even more difficult if we accept the claims being made in current Italian immigrant historiography: namely, that Italians attained upward economic mobility in a relatively short time. In view of the findings of this chapter, Chapter 4 will investigate the economy and the occupational structure of the Italian Quarter.

Chapter 4 - WORK

Chapter 3 examined the demographic structure and growth of the St.Bartholomew Italian population, from its inception during the last decades of the nineteenth century through to the 1930s. It was demonstrated that Italians came to Britain through chain migration, and a small number who originated from the agricultural province of Frosinone settled in a poor slum district of Birmingham. In the Italian Quarter which they established, two subsequent generations were born and together they remained there for more than fifty years.

The St. Bartholomew Italians left Italy in similar economic circumstances to many thousands of other Italians who migrated to countries in the western hemisphere, late in the nineteenth century, and who arrived at their destinations in a poor state in search of financial stability. This chapter is concerned with employment among the St. Bartholomew Italians and has two main objectives: firstly to identify the types of work they did, and secondly to assess their levels of income. To do this the work of men and women and, where relevant, children will be considered throughout the period.

Chapter 4 begins with an examination of occupational data for the years 1891 and 1916 and continues with a discussion about each of the categories of employment shown in Table 9. With the exception of the census and Aliens Registers, documentary evidence about employment in the Quarter is scarce. None the less, respondents' testimonies have provided extensive information about the types of the work done by St. Bartholomew Italians; their working conditions and to a lesser extent, their incomes can also be assessed.

Table 9. Occupations of first generation St.Bartholomew Italians in 1891 and 1916[1]

Occupations	1891	1916
Street musicians	48	7
Ice Cream manufacturers & vendors	20	11
Terrazzo workers	1	18
Food dealers/mnfs & board/lodgings	3	9
Factory workers	4	48
Total employed in these occupations	76	93

The figures in Table 9 show the five major types of employment in which the first generation of St. Bartholomew Italians were engaged and the number of workers in each, in 1891 and 1916. For reasons discussed in Chapter 1 relating to the under-registration of Italians in the census, the figures in shown in the above table represent the minimum number of St. Bartholomew Italians employed in these occupations. The first three occupations shown in Table 9 are either Italianate or those commonly, yet not exclusively, associated with Italians such as organ-grinding, ice-cream making and selling and terrazzo work, and they occupied well over a half of employed male and female St. Bartholomew Italians in 1891, and more than a quarter in 1916.

The statistics in Table 9 appear to indicate that between 1891 and 1916 a radical change in the occupational structure of the St. Bartholomew Italian population occurred. However, although fundamental changes did take place, particularly in relation to organ-grinding, ice-cream making and selling, and in the trade of terrazzo, the evidence from 1916 must be assessed against the temporary circumstances induced by the war, and should be read only as a part of the long-term trends that began late in the nineteenth century. This chapter will examine the five categories of work shown in Table 9 and discuss the changes and continuities that occurred during the period 1891 to 1938 with regard to work among the St. Bartholomew Italians.

---

[1]Adapted from the *Census, 1891* and *Aliens Registers.* Only occupations where 5 or more St. Bartholomew Italians were employed in either year have been shown

Street Musicians

During the last decade of the nineteenth century Italian emigration to England and Wales increased more than at any other time during that century. A large number of these Italians became street musicians, namely, organ-grinders;[2] but their prevalence was short lived because from the end of the first decade of the twentieth century their numbers started to decrease and they had almost disappeared by the beginning of World War Two.[3]

A similar pattern of increase and then gradual decrease of Italian organ-grinders was apparent in Birmingham. The 1891census reveals that the occupation of street musician was common among St. Bartholomew Italians,[4] and from the early 1890s until at least 1912 they continued to be numerous in the city.[5] It is not possible to state exactly when numbers began to decrease, but it seems World War One may have had a dramatic effect, for an unknown number of Italian organ-grinders became employed by the local munitions industries in Birmingham,[6] and the number of St. Bartholomew Italian organ-grinders fell from 48 in 1891, to just 7 in 1916. However, it is probable that some Italians resumed working as organ-grinders after the war, since there is very little evidence to suggest they continued with factory work.

For much of the nineteenth century the vast majority of Italian street musicians in Birmingham were males, but there is very little evidence that they continued to be organ-grinders after World War One. However, there is evidence which suggests that

---

[2]In 1891 of the estimated 9,909 Italians in England and Wales, 1441 were street musicians and was the most common type of employment among Italians: L. Sponza, *Italian Immigrants in Nineteenth Century Britain: Realties and Images,* Leicester U.P, 1989, p 54.

[3]In 1891 there were 1,119 Italian organ-grinders in England and Wales and in 1931 just 97: T. Colpi, *The Italian Factor,* Edinburgh, 1991, p 80.

[4]*Census, 1891.*

[5]On at least three occasions during the period 1901 to 1912 street musicians were reported to have been numerous in B'ham: *Police Orders,* 1.10.01; *B'ham Daily Gazette,* 4.2.93; *Pentland' s 'Street Robins' Annual Report,* 1912, p 21.

[6] No figures or other details are provided which might give clues about the extent of the decline of Italian organ-grinders in the city: *B'ham Daily Mail,* 5.2.16.

Italian women were engaged in this occupation until at least the end of the 1920s, and in 1927, it was female organ-grinders who were remembered by the local press as being "in charge of barrel organs" in the city.[7] Female Italian organ-grinders first made their appearance in the Birmingham census in 1891, when a small number of young and single Italian women were registered living in the lodging house of padrone G. Delicatto.[8] Judging from the census details it seems some of these women were related to each other, and also that they were unaccompanied by male relatives. Several St. Bartholomew Italians talked about their grand-mothers, aunts and mothers who had played barrel organs on the streets of the city from the last decade of the nineteenth century, and how both single women and married women with children had worked, either alone or accompanied by their husbands. One respondent described her grandmother who, during the 1890s and then in her twenties and the mother of two small boys, would:

> "... use the barrel organ to get pennies in".[9]

Even though the remuneration her grandmother received for this work was meagre it was a crucial contribution to the family's income.[10] A benefit of working as an organ-grinder was its convenience, and therefore it appealed to women because it could be fitted in around their family responsibilities, even though this could mean working unsociable hours. A respondent recalled how a mother of thirteen children would get the oldest to mind the others in the evening whilst she went out with a barrel organ.[11] It is clear that St.Bartholomew Italian women were so dependent on the small amount

---

[7]*B'ham Daily Mail*, 1.10.27.
[8]*Census, 1891.*
[9]EBF2001.
[10]In relation to Italians who went to live in America at the same time, it has been claimed that for as long as women's wages were not great, and were no threat to the male breadwinner's authority they were allowed to work: V. Yans McLaughlin, "Patterns of Work and Family Organisation: Buffalo's Italians", T.K. Rabb and R.I. Rothberg (eds), *The Family in History*, New York, 1971, p 120.
[11]LGF3006.

of income generated through organ-grinding that they were prepared to protect physically their right to practice this occupation, if necessary. Each street trader had a selling pitch which was informally agreed between them, yet this did not prevent competition occurring which, sometimes, was intense. Some pitches were more remunerative than others and, as a result squabbles sometimes occurred between street traders over the perceived, or real, encroachment of another on what they considered to be 'their' territory. Amicable agreements were not always achieved, and a few court cases show how females, as well as males, had attempted to oust another from a pitch.[12] Working as a street musician could be particularly harrowing: not only were conditions often extreme, but, as demonstrated above, competition from other street traders could be violent and even life threatening. Furthermore, there were the obvious moral concerns about female street traders, and during the first decades of the twentieth century there was a campaign in the city to try to prevent females working in any type of street occupation. This way of life for females was described by the Head Missioner, H.S. Pelham, as one which, "inevitably leads to wildness and looseness ... ending almost invariably in immorality".[13]

In chapter two it was demonstrated how street musicians, who were perceived as beggars, were discouraged in Birmingham. This unsympathetic attitude continued in the twentieth century when laws were updated to deal with street musicians; those whom the police caught for causing street obstructions, playing close to residential areas, or not having a license could receive a fine of up to £5.00.[14] The perceptions of street musicians in the city and the experiences of St. Bartholomew Italians in relation to this occupation will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

---

[12]*B'ham Daily Gazette*, 4.2.93; *B'ham Daily Post*, 12.4.05 and 19.5.05.
[13]*Street Trading by Children*, H.S. Pelham, Head Missioner of the B'ham Street Children's Union, 1910. No evidence has been found to suggest St. Bartholomew Italian female organ-grinders became prostitutes.
[14]The Good Rule and Government (Bye-law), 24.9.14. H. Wells, *B'ham Bye-Laws, 1864-1931*, B'ham, 1932. There is also a claim made in C. Albericci's unpublished autobiography that, during the 1920s, organ-grinders were banned from B'ham's streets. However, no substantiating evidence has been found.

During the first half of the twentieth century fewer St. Bartholomew Italians became organ-grinders. However, compelled by the threat of unemployment they worked in other aspects of the barrel organ business, such as maintenance and repairs and the manufacture of the decorative wooden housings which supported the organs.[15] Mrs. B remembered how, during the 1920s, her father worked weekends tuning barrel organs at 6d (2.5p) per each. The demise of organ-grinding was due in part, to its declining public appeal, and growing competition from other more modern forms of entertainment such as cinema and dance halls.[16] Despite attempts to revitalise public interest by introducing more modern tunes the decline continued,[17] and by the end of the 1920s barrel organs in the Italian Quarter were controlled by just six families, two of whom were under the direction of women. [18] Of those Italians who continued beyond the 1920s, most did so as employers, rather than as independent workers or employees. An example is Mrs. O's grandfather who, in the 1920s and 1930s owned eight or nine barrel organs which he maintained and hired out to others on a daily basis.[19] The cost of hiring barrel-organs varied throughout the period and in 1905 was around 1/8d (8p) a day.[20] However, as the Italians updated the music played on these organs so the hire charge increased and during the 1930s it

---

[15]MDF3012.

[16]Cinemas and dance halls became popular pursuits when leisure hours and incomes increased for the working-class. By World War One there were 3,000 cinemas in the United Kingdom and by 1937 40% of the population went to the cinema once a week: J. Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity*, Routledge, 1994, p 186. For the information about the growing appeal of the cinema during the inter-war period see: J. Benson, *The Rise of the Consumer Society in Britain, 1880-1980*, Longman, 1994, p 98; A. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty. Working-Class culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939*, Open University, 1992, p 74; J. Stevenson, *Social History of Britain. British Society, 1914-1945*, Penguin, 1990, p 402; H. Cunningham, "Leisure", J. Benson (ed), *The Working-Class in England, 1875-1914*, Croom Helm, 1984, p 138.

[17]One respondent told how she and her mother would go to the B'ham Hippodrome to listen to Jack Hilton, a local band leader, to discover new songs and then her father would send away to Spinelli's in London to have the organs re-marked: FOF3021.

[18]MDF3012, GSF3017 and FOF2021.

[19]FOF3021.

[20]*B'ham Daily Post*, 2.5.05.

was between 2/- (10p) and 4/- (20p), depending on how popular the tunes were that were played.[21] During this period it became less common for Italians to play these instruments and increasingly that barrel organs owned by St. Bartholomew Italians were hired by non-Italians.[22]

> "Whenever we came up to the University's (B'ham) carnival week, ... the students used to come and book the organs, dress them up. Well, my grandfather used to dress them up and I used to have to help with the bunting and the pictures of King George and Queen Mary ... their pictures would always be on the front."[23]

For some then, during the 1920s and 1930s, in spite of its poor reputation, the barrel organ continued to hold a degree of curio value. Yet, for others, and particularly the poor, beneath the facade of novelty lay their crucial means of income because it seems that barrel organ playing was a common occupation among men and women who otherwise found obtaining employment difficult.[24] Mrs. G's account of the mother of thirteen is one example, but there are others; the organ-grinding occupation was prevalent among injured ex-servicemen of World War One.[25] A lodger at Mrs. O's house,

> "... had 5 children in one room, and his wife was Italian. He was English but he'd been injured during the First World War, and he used to (hire a barrel organ) because he couldn't find any employment."[26]

---

[21]F0F3021.

[22]There was a similar organisation among organ-grinders in Manchester: A. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, p 117.

[23]F0F3021.

[24]Respondent LGF3006 talked of a man who used to come to her grandfather's to hire a barrel organ, who lived at the local workhouse.

[25]Further evidence that ex-soldiers hired barrel organs from Italians is provided in the *B'ham Post*, 3.2.22 when two men, one a wounded soldier, appeared in court charged with stealing and damaging a barrel organ they had hired from E. Di Felice of 7, Duddeston Row. See also *B'ham Daily Mail*, 1.10.27. Samuel Yates remembers the Italian Quarter during the first half of the twentieth century and confirms barrel-organs were hired by English First World War victims: *B'ham Daily Post*, 19.11.1995.

[26]FOF3021.

Those St. Bartholomew Italians who remained in the barrel organ trade during the 1920s and 1930s were mainly the ageing first generation who had very limited employment options and no state pension. Although they were not padroni, a minority of these Italians practised the old system of employing their boarders as organ-grinders and paying them a percentage from their daily takings. During the 1930s, and at the approximate age of sixty years,

> "Our gran had the four (organs). Gran had got two lodgers and they used to take the organs out. The lodgers were English, Sam and Frank, and they worked for Gran. They used to bring the money back, she'd count it on the table, and she'd give 'em, y'know, so much."[27]

This woman had worked in the business since her arrival in Birmingham during the 1890s, initially as a musician and then as an owner and hirer of barrel organs.

It is extremely difficult to establish what income was generated from organ-grinding because few written records appear to exist. Furthermore, attempting to estimate the earnings from this work is hazardous since they largely depended on the season and the goodwill of the audience. The padroni of the nineteenth century recognised that the most lucrative organisation of this trade was to employ a number of organ-grinders. These workers were given board and lodgings and a percentage of their takings, which enabled the worker to return to Italy at the end of the season with money for his family. The padrone kept the remainder of the daily takings which was sufficient to provide a profit. However, organ-grinding among the independent workers was not as lucrative and it seems their income kept them only just above the poverty-line. In the spring of 1905 the average wages of one organ-grinder were estimated at £1 per week.[28] A comparison of this wage with Rowntree's estimate of 21/8d (108p) as the 'poverty-line' in Britain, shows that organ-grinders were earning insufficient to keep a family of four or five.[29] During the period 1906-1935 the level

---

[27]GSF3017.
[28]*B'ham Daily Post*, 2.5.05. In Manchester an organ-grinder was quoted as earning 2/6d (12.5p) per day, in 1904: A. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, p 102.
[29]S. Rowntree based his calculations of poverty on a family of 4 or 5.

of real incomes in Britain increased by around 2.5 times: this happened fairly rapidly during World War One, and thereafter levelled out until the mid 1930s.[30] Based on this figure (of 2.5) and the wages of an organ-grinder in 1905 (£1), a crude estimate of 50/- (£2 50p) per week has been calculated as being the wages from organ-grinding at the end of the 1920s[31] In 1929, Dr. John Robertson, the ex-Chief Medical Officer of Health for Birmingham, estimated that the poverty-line in the city was about 45/- (£2 25p),[32] which suggests that organ-grinders were earning a wage which, once again, was slightly above subsistence level.

The occupation of street musician gradually declined among St. Bartholomew Italians throughout the period; this was due to several factors among which were its increasing unpopularity during the nineteenth century, and competition from other forms of entertainment during the twentieth century. In addition, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century catering occupations were being developed by Italians in Britain and these offered far more remuneration than did organ-grinding. Furthermore, the domestic catering business provided work for the whole family.

Italians in Britain developed two types of catering work at the end of the nineteenth century: fixed catering, namely restaurants, cafes and fried fish shops, and the domestic industry of ice-cream manufacture and sale.

The domestic ice-cream industry

Although ice-cream vendors were present in Britain from at least the 1860s they were not numerous until the last two decades of the nineteenth century.[33]

---

[30]Benson, *The Working Class in Britain*, p 55.
[31]This calculation has been based on £1 wages in 1905, multiplied 2.5 times and on the assumption that wages in this occupation rose at the average rate of full-time incomes in Britain.
[32]*B'ham Daily Mail*, 5.7.29.
[33]There were just 33 ice-cream vendors recorded in England and Wales in 1861; 1881,356; 1891, 2824 and 1911, 1281: Sponza, *Realities and Images* p 54. In London, in 1857, Carlo Gatti was recorded as an ice-cream: Sponza, *Realities and Images*, pp 96-7.

Initially, and until at least 1903, padroni employed people to sell ice-cream, but during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century independent Italian ice-cream manufacturers and sellers became more common in England and Wales.[34] The number of Italian ice-cream vendors began to increase rapidly in England and Wales during the second half of the nineteenth century.

The first ice-cream manufacturer to appear in the census in the St. Bartholomew's ward was Bernadette, wife of the lodging house keeper John Spinetto, in 1881.[35] However, early in the twentieth century, John Devoti, an Italian who lived on the outskirts of the Quarter, boasted that he was, 'The Old Original Maker of the Celebrated Ice-Cream", and claimed to have begun his business in 1875.[36] Although it is not clear when Italian ice-cream makers and sellers first came to Birmingham, their appearance seems to have roughly coincided with the widespread growth of the Italian catering industry in England and Wales at the end of the nineteenth century.

Within the enclave of single, male St. Bartholomew Italians who lived in the lodging houses owned by padroni, in 1891, were street musicians and a small number of ice-cream vendors. Also living in the Quarter at that time were families who made and sold ice-cream independently. Initially the ice-cream industry began as a "complementary" occupation "grafted" on to organ-grinding and it is likely that, together with baked potato selling, it changed according to the season.[37] However, even after the demise of the organ-grinding business, ice-cream manufacture and sale was more often only a part-time, weekend and bank holiday occupation pursued in conjunction with other types of work. Only a minority of St. Bartholomew Italians were involved in the ice-cream industry full-time and these few worked all year round selling ice-cream locally and out of town. One such family, who sold ice-cream from

---

[34]Sponza, *Realities and Images,* p 99 and see also *PP*, Royal Commission on Alien Immigration, Vols. 1-4, 1904, p 260.
[35]*Census, 1881.*
[36]*Pentland's Street Robin Annual Report*, 1914, p 7.
[37]Ice-cream was mostly a warm weather occupation and during the colder months baked potatoes were sold instead.

their pony and float ice-cream cart, travelled twelve miles each day to the Black Country, and sold at the local fairs around the Midlands.[38]

In the same way that the organ-grinding businesses had instigated the need for service industries, subsidiary trades developed in the Quarter associated with ice-cream making and selling, and notable among them were Italian carpenters and a tin smith. Mrs. G remembered during the 1920s her grandfather who built a shed in their yard where,

> "he used to repair the ice-cream carts, he was a carpenter and then he used to sell ice-cream at weekends. I don't remember him doing anything else."[39]

Casual labour was sometimes recruited from within the Quarter, but more often ice-cream businesses were organised around the family. The whole of the family's involvement in ice-cream making and selling had several advantages, for not only was it cost effective, since children did not usually receive payment, but working as a unit served to strengthen the bond between them as they worked in competition against other families in the Quarter. Furthermore, this organisation of labour reinforced the patriarchal role of the father. Men and women both manufactured and sold ice-cream, although it was common for women to have help from male relatives to carry out the heavier 'freezing' process.[40] In common with most types of self-employment among the St. Bartholomew Italians, the labour of children was utilised, just as it had been in Italy on the farms. Respondents spoke about how as children, early each Saturday morning, it had been their job to collect the large block of ice used in the manufacture of the ice-cream. Others described the long hours they stirred the

---

[38]JGM2027.
[39]LGF3006.
[40]Ice-cream making consisted of several stages: boiling, cooling and 'freezing'. At the freezing stage the cooled and thickened custard mixture was placed in a metal drum-like container which was surrounded with packed ice and placed within another metal container. The custard then had to be stirred until it 'froze'. The freezing process was done by hand and usually took a number of hours, and it was at this stage that men and children helped: NPM3009; VIF2004; JGM3027.

'cream' whilst it froze, or helped ageing grandparents to push fully laden ice-cream carts to their selling pitches. Some told how even they had taken out ice-cream carts:

> "I used to go down the Parade, Nelson Street. I used to go and stand on the corner there. And this friend of mine used to stay with me and, of course, if we used to see a coppa I used to do it in me trousers nearly, 'cos I was under age see, thirteen."[41]

The number of under-aged children who were used to sell ice-cream was not made clear by respondents; most said they had been 'about' thirteen years old and were therefore legally permitted to work. The extent of illegal child labour in the Quarter was difficult to assess, but a factor which seems to support the view that using under-age children to sell ice-cream was uncommon, was the very small number of prosecutions made against St. Bartholomew Italian parents.[42]

For at least the first decade of their settlement in the Quarter, St. Bartholomew Italians made ice-cream in the communal brewhouses located in the yards close to their homes. This arrangement continued until local authority health regulations were introduced in 1903.[43] Since the end of the nineteenth century there had been concerns over the conditions in which ice-cream was produced and sold. Elsewhere in Britain food poisoning had occurred and the cause had been attributed to ice-cream manufactured by Italians.[44] The introduction of local authority hygiene regulations in Birmingham at the beginning of the twentieth century threatened to end the domestic

---

[41]NPM3009.

[42]During the first decade of the twentieth century there were persistent campaigns in B'ham to reduce the number of under-age street workers. Police orders show the intensity of these campaigns, particularly during 1904-5: *Police Orders.* Court registers indicate that numerous parents were prosecuted but among them only 2 Italians were found: *Juvenile Court and Petty Sessions Registers*, Courts 1 and 2, 9.1.05 and 18.6.08.

[43]Regulations were introduced in 1903 and through the B'ham Corporation Act, 1935, Section 54.

[44]An early discussion about the manufacture and sale of ice-cream occurred in parliament in 1898 after an outbreak of food poisoning occurred and a child subsequently died. The cause of death was believed to have been eating contaminated ice-cream: *PP.* The Sale of Ice Creams in the Streets, 23.6.98.

production of ice-cream among Italians unless suitable accommodation was found where ice-cream could be manufactured hygienically. Relief came when 'sheds' were built in the Quarter for the specific use of ice-cream production, and in 1910 there were at least two sheds, and Italians were charged 1/- (5p) a week for their use.[45]

Undoubtedly, the ice-cream trade proved to be more popular than organ-grinding, even though from time to time it too created public alarm and concern as in 1905.[46] Even so, the popularity of the 'penny ice' among the British continued unabated throughout the period, and much of its success was probably due to its affordability among the working-class population.

Among St. Bartholomew Italians, and especially the first generation, the attractions of working in the of ice-cream industry were that it offered independence and the potential to generate high income if weather conditions were conducive. Even after deducting the initial cost of making an ice-cream cart, the fee for the use of the ice-cream sheds and buying the ingredients, the cost of manufacturing ice-cream remained low enough for a profit to be made.[47] It is very difficult to state exactly what income was generated by ice-cream manufacture and sale for, in common with organ-grinding there were so many variables; takings varied according to the season and also the sales pitch. In 1905 a boy working in Birmingham city centre for the padrone Antonio Frezza claimed to have taken around 17/- (85p) per day.[48] A respondent explained that his parents,

---

[45]Ice-cream factories were located in Banbury Street and Bartholomew Street: *MOH Report*, 1911, p 78. The father of WFF3008 also had premises where between 8 -10 Italians would regularly make ice-cream each weekend.

[46]In 1905 an outbreak of food poisoning in B'ham was traced to contaminated ice-cream.

[47]Although there were men in the Quarter who repaired ice-cream carts it was common for ice-cream sellers to make their own. The metal ice-cream containers used inside were made by the Italian tinsmith Mr. Matiello, who also lived in the Italian Quarter:

[48]Adapted from *MOH Report*, 1905, p 102. In 1893 in London, it was reported that takings were between £1-2 per week. A 'week' is likely to have been a weekend, i.e. Saturday and Sunday, since ice-cream was not generally sold during the week unless it had been left-over from the weekend. Respondent NPM3009 described how his

> " always tried to get a place at the Botanical Gardens, it was a good place there. Two carts there. The other place would be somewhere around the picture house (cinema), the Gaiety, Coliseum."[49]

In the middle of the 1920s selling pitches such as those occupied by the parents of Mr.Z were at a premium and would be expected to generate good daily takings over the weekend of about £3-4.[50] Such pitches were as valuable as those where Italians had played barrel organs, and similarly were the subject of animosity between the St. Bartholomew Italians.

Competition between ice-cream vendors increased as greater numbers of Italians turned from organ-grinding to ice-cream selling during the late nineteenth, and the first decade of the twentieth centuries, when most St. Bartholomew Italian families became involved in the ice-cream industry. In 1891 the census shows that 20% of employed adult St. Bartholomew Italians were engaged in this occupation[51] and it is likely that the remainder, of whom the majority were organ-grinders, also became employed in the ice-cream industry. Certainly, by 1901 the presence of ice-cream vendors in the city was sufficient to attract police attention, and at the height of the ice-cream season in August of that year, the Chief Police Superintendent requested that constables collect information about the number and nationality of ice-cream traders and how many carts they each owned.[52] Police interest continued, and in 1909 street trader licences were revoked with the explanation from the Chief Constable that a review about, "the desirability of ice-cream vendors in the streets"

---

mother would sell left-over ice-cream in the Rag Market on Tuesday, but this only occurred when sales at the weekend had been particularly poor. Any ice-cream left after Tuesday was thrown away: *Emigrazione e colonie*, p 307, cited by Sponza, *Realities and Images*, p 99.

[49] HZM2005.

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] *Census, 1891.*

[52] *Police Order*, 23.8.1901. In 1901 a local newspaper reported that a single ice-cream manufacturer from the Quarter had between 20-30 ice-cream carts: Newspaper unknown, 19.11.01.

was taking place.[53] No further evidence has been found to suggest why this occurred, but there are a number of plausible explanations. For example, the police might have had to deal with arguments over selling pitches, or alternatively, perhaps the local health authorities were concerned about hygiene conditions surrounding the manufacture and sale of ice-cream.[54] Even so, the trade continued in the city but, in 1916, only 11% of the St. Bartholomew Italian working, adult population were recorded as being employed in the ice-cream industry.[55] This seems very low and was probably as a result of the war, for as discussed previously, St. Bartholomew Italians worked in the munitions factories during this period, and others had enlisted. Furthermore, ice-cream manufacturers had the problem of war-time shortages of sugar and dairy produce; which no doubt also curtailed ice-cream production.[56]

Following the war the ice-cream industry is likely to have recovered the numbers it had pre-war. Although documentary data is not available and oral testimonies show some hesitation about information relating to the early 1920s, there is some evidence to suggest that during this period at least some of the adult second generation St. Bartholomew Italians joined parents in their ice-cream businesses.[57] This was because during the early 1920s, when many of the second generation were raising their own families, restricted employment opportunities limited the options of St. Bartholomew Italians to organ-grinding and ice-cream manufacture and sale.[58]

---

[53] *Police Order*, 5.5.1909.

[54] The MOH reported that during the autumn of 1910 and the whole of 1911 ice-cream manufacturing conditions had been examined, especially in the Italian Quarter of the city: *MOH Report*, 1911, p 78.

[55] *Aliens Registers*..

[56] "Unsweetened", a reader complained that Italian ice-cream makers seemed to have been unaffected by the sugar shortages, and that they were allowed 25lbs per week: *B'ham Daily Mail*, 8.8.17. However, sugar shortages do appear to have been felt, for earlier in the year confectioners had complained (op.cit., 28.6.17), and in the same month, an Italian was prosecuted for receiving sugar on the black market: *B'ham Daily Mail*, 4.8.17.

[57] HZM2005.

[58] High unemployment and hostility limited the employment prospects of St. Bartholomew Italians. In July of 1921 there were 80,023 unemployed in B'ham: *B'ham Post*, 28.7.21. Hostility towards Italians in B'ham will be discussed in Chapter 6.

However, later in the 1920s diversification and occupational changes began to occur in the St. Bartholomew Italian community which were largely due to three influences. The first was the introduction of terrazzo work, which will be discussed below. The second related to ice-cream producers from outside the Quarter. Although the Italians enjoyed a certain amount of customer loyalty,[59] there was growing competition from large commercial ice-cream companies. Midland Counties Dairies Ltd., El Dorado Co., and Wall's Ltd., all began to advertise in the local trades directories during the late 1920s, and they not only produced ice-cream in modern and hygienic surroundings, but sold on the streets and through franchises. The extent of the competition faced by Italians in Birmingham from commercial ice-cream companies can be judged from the number of small shops franchised to sell ice-cream. In 1936 they numbered 1,301 and two years later this rose to 1,353, and during the same period the number of vendors licensed to sell ice-cream on the streets decreased from 318 to 69.[60] The latter figure included street vendors who were employed by the commercial ice-cream producers in addition to St. Bartholomew Italians, and suggest there occurred a rapid transfer of business from the domestic producer of ice-cream to retail outlets, probably corner shops. The third factor which affected the extent of ice-cream manufacturing and selling in the Quarter was the reluctance of first generation St. Bartholomew Italians to change organisation and production methods. Earlier in the century they had altered their procedures to conform to the ice-cream manufacturing hygiene regulations required by the local authorities. However, during the 1930s they were unwilling to change from the labour intensive method of ice-cream production. Furthermore, they held strong reservations about the involvement of non-family members in their businesses.

> "A lot of it, they didn't wanna know about banks, they didn't wanna know about income tax, or anything like that, so. And to go commercial they

---

[59] JGM3027.
[60] *MOH Reports*: 1936, p 148 and 1938, p 150.

gotta do this, and declare everything.[61]

A notable exception to the disinclination among Italians to move with the times was the entrepreneur Enrico Facchino who founded the 'Mr.Whippy' organisation. Facchino came to Birmingham from Sora during the 1890s, and lived with his wife and nine children in a back-to-back house in Bartholomew Street. He began as a part-time cobbler, part-time ice-cream worker who developed the idea of serving ice-cream in wafer biscuits instead of from 'licking glasses'.[62] Facchino made and sold wafer biscuits to other Italians. The use of biscuits reduced the possibilities of spreading illness and therefore helped to safeguard the continuation of their livelihood, which was threatened if public confidence in their product was not maintained. As a result of his innovation Facchino became very wealthy, and he and his family later moved out of the Italian Quarter to live in the suburbs of the city.[63] However, similar success stories were rare in the Italian Quarter and, for the overwhelming majority of St. Bartholomew Italians their involvement in the catering industry was as penny capitalists rather than entrepreneurs.

In comparison with other types of work being discussed in this chapter, the section about the ice-cream industry is disproportionately longer. This is because more evidence is currently available about the ice-cream industry than any other form of employment involving St. Bartholomew Italians. In addition, this lengthy exposition reflects the importance of the ice-cream industry in the Quarter. It has been demonstrated how the extent of involvement of St. Bartholomew Italians within the ice-cream industry fluctuated during the period and how each generation depended to a lesser or greater extent on ice-cream production and sale as a form of income. Even

---

[61]JGM3027.

[62]Before the introduction of biscuit wafers and cones ice-cream was served to customers in 'licking glasses'. However, because of the lack of washing facilities these serving glasses were insufficiently cleaned after use, and therefore, any bacteria present were passed between customers.

[63]Facchino also moved his factory to the suburbs of B'ham and in the 1960s was taken over by the Forte organisation: *B'ham Sunday Mercury*, 7.10.62. Colpi states that Facchino was the largest ice-cream cone and biscuit manufacturer in Britain: Colpi, *Italian Factor*, p 82.

so, this was the most important of all of the occupations available to them because it created a micro-economy within the Quarter, on which the whole St. Bartholomew Italian community depended. Furthermore, establishing their own family ice-cream business, even though this may have been pursued only on a part-time basis, gave the first generation of St. Bartholomew Italians a feeling of self-worth and achievement which their employment as street musicians had not provided.

Food dealers and board and lodging house keepers

During the period 1881 to 1911, in many large towns in England and Wales, there was a growth in the number of Italian run cafes, restaurants, fried fish shops, milk bars, small shops, and board and lodging houses.[64] However, in Birmingham only a small number of Italian catering establishments were evident and the majority of these did not appear until the 1930s.[65] It was probably not until after the First World War that the St. Bartholomew Italians became associated with the newer forms of catering as the proprietors[66] of confectionery[67] and delicatessen shops and boarding houses.

---

[64]Italian boarding house keepers, confectioners, waiters and cooks increased from around 229 to 6745 during the period 1861 to 191104/01/80 Sponza, *Realities and Images,* p 54.

[65]These businesses were registered by Mrs. E. DeFelice and Mr. V. Pontone and were located in Chapel Street and Park Street, respectively: *Kelly's Commercial Trade Directories,* 1930.

[66]Two further small shops were mentioned by respondents which were likely to have been general stores: FVM3003. In one example the shop was a temporary enterprise undertaken by a mother who had two small children, and who converted the front room of her house into a shop which reverted back to a living room as the number of children in the family increased: BEF3011.

[67]A small number of Italian confectionery shops were located outside of the Quarter, mostly in the centre of B'ham and were owned by the Devoti family: *Kelly's Commercial Trades Directories,* 1910, 1920, 1930, 1938. Evidence indicates that the Devoti family were related by marriage to the Granelli's (*St. Michael's RC, Baptism Register,* 27.10.94), who, from the late nineteenth century, owned confectionery and ice-cream businesses in the north of England: R. Home, *Macclesfield as it was,* Hendon Publishers, 1978. It is probable that the Devoti family were given financial assistance which helped them to establish their own confectionery shops in B'ham between 1910 and 1938.

One of the earliest Italian shops in the Italian Quarter was run in 1910, by Antonio Tavolieri.[68] In Chapter 3 it was suggested Tavolieri had provided employment for his cousin, Pietro, in his confectionery shop and how, later on, he opened his own fried fish shop in the Quarter.[69] Tavolieri probably arrived in Birmingham during 1890,[70] aged twenty-eight years, when he worked as an organ-grinder for the padrone, Domenic Delicatto who ran a lodging house in the Quarter.[71] Different members of the Delicatto family had, for a number of years, been padroni in Birmingham and it is highly probable that, in return for a share of the profits, Delicatto provided the finances which enabled Tavolieri to establish his confectionery shop. Similar financial arrangements were not uncommon among Italians elsewhere in Britain, and helped to form a bond between them, whilst also assisting upward mobility.[72] Tavolieri's shop remained in the Quarter until at least the 1920s, by which time he had introduced his sons into the business.[73]

Two other Italian shops located in the Quarter during the 1920s and 1930s specialised in provisions imported from Italy.[74] These delicatessen shops were well remembered by numerous respondents, who recalled the different varieties of Italian foodstuffs they sold, such as lubin beans, olive oil in cans, fresh garlic and peppers, dried macaroni packed in long wooden crates, salamis, cheese and wine.[75] These

---

[68]Antonio Tavolieri's confectionery shop was first recorded in *Kelly's Commercial Trades Directory* in 1910.

[69]This appears to have been the only fried fish shop in the Quarter during the period under investigation. Fried fish shops were not uncommon types of employment for Italians in Britain, especially in Scotland and Ireland: B. Sereni, *They Took The High Road,* Barga, 1974; B. Reynolds, *Casalattico and the Italian Community in Ireland,* UCD Foundation for Italian Studies, 1993; J.K. Walton, *Fish and Chips and the British Working-Class,* London U.P, 1991.

[70]The earliest entry found in the census for Antonio Tavolieri is 1891 when he was recorded as Antonio 'Tablear': *Census, 1891.*

[71]*B'ham Daily Gazette,* 4.2.93.

[72]Sereni, *They Took the High Road,* p 24 and Colpi, *Italian Factor,* p 62.

[73]*Kelly's Commercial Trade Directories,* 1910 and 1920.

[74]RFM2026.

[75]These shops were remembered by all of the respondents interviewed. Verbal information from Mrs. Devoti and respondents GSF3017, EMF2016, EMF2025 suggest Italians who lived outside the Quarter would regularly use these shops.

shops performed a multiple role. Not only did they supply food that could not be bought anywhere else in the city, but they played an important role in the cohesion of the Italian community in Birmingham and the sustainment of its ethnic identity. These shops were meeting places where Italian was spoken and the latest gossip swapped. In addition these delicatessen shops demonstrated to the wider society the ethnic distinctiveness of the Quarter.

The first Italian run cafes appeared in the Quarter during the 1930s and two of these were owned by St. Bartholomew Italians who had other retail outlets there. Multiple proprietorship of retail outlets was common in Scotland and South Wales but unusual in the Quarter.[76] Indeed, fixed retailing was uncommon among the St. Bartholomew Italians; more much prevalent were the types of self-employment which required little or no initial investment or specialist knowledge. Taking boarders was one such occupation and was pursued mostly by women in the Quarter, because it required no capital investment and could be accommodated within the family routine without creating too much disruption.

Although taking boarders was an extension of the padroni lodging house system of the nineteenth century, in reality the two systems had little in common.[77] In general boarders lived with the Italians on a temporary basis, and were provided with a bed and some of their meals, which would be eaten with the family. Some of the smallest of houses in the Quarter took in boarders, for example, in 1916, at 6, Bartholomew Street, in a two bedroom, back-to-back type house, there lived a munitions worker, his unemployed wife, and with seven boarders who worked in the terrazzo trade.[78]

---

[76]Eugenie DeFelice also ran a delicatessen shop and Vincent Pontone also had a confectionery shop.
[77]In the years 1891 and 1916 there were just three and thereafter, during the 1920s and 1930s the number reduced to two; both took lodgers of all nationalities, and one was a women's hostel.
[78]*Aliens Registers.*

Past research has suggested that boarders were brought to Britain from Italy who were the young relatives and kin of the householder, but this is not true of the majority of boarders who lived in the Quarter.[79] In numerous St. Bartholomew Italian households during the 1920s and 1930s, boarders were adult single men, many of whom were not Italian. These men not only lived with the St. Bartholomew Italians, but often were also employed by them and did a variety of jobs such as child minding,[80] or helping in the ice-cream business. Mr. P described the roles of boarders who lived at his home:

> "I mean we'd got four people in the house as well that used to do all the work. There was Mr. Madeley and his sister, Mrs. Madeley, and they lived with us there, and they, Mrs. Madeley, used to help in the house, help mom, and er, the two fellas, used to go out and do the ice-cream."[81]

Mr. P's mother was one of five children, his mother ran an ice-cream business whilst his father worked as a long-distance road haulage driver.

Not only were there practical benefits in taking boarders, but it was also lucrative. During the first twenty years of the twentieth century the financial rewards of taking boarders was recognised by some St. Bartholomew Italians, mostly men, who moved out of the Quarter into larger premises which they adapted into self-contained rooms. Between the end of World War One and 1920, Mrs. L's grandfather moved about a mile away from his former home in Bartholomew Street into a converted public house, which was large enough to accommodate comfortably three generations of her family in addition to boarders. She explained that this was a way of keeping the family together and,

> "grandfather having lodgers was our way of coping, see?"[82]

---

[79]Chinn, "We All Come From 'Round Sora".
[80]Italian men who were employed to child mind or baby-sit, were usually older men and were referred to as "cozone" (sic). Verbal information from respondent:GLF2002.
[81]LPM3007.
[82]MLF3014.

Relocation such as that described above was rarely done solely to be able to take boarders; more often the 'new' premises were large enough to fulfil a variety of needs. In the 1920s Mr. G's father moved from the Quarter to premises in Tyseley which comprised a fried fish shop, outside sheds and yard which he adapted into an ice-cream making area and a storage place for ice-cream carts. The surplus living accommodation in the house he let to boarders.[83]

This section has demonstrated that in the Quarter fixed retail businesses were neither numerous nor varied and were limited to a small number of food shops and a couple of cafes. However, the delicatessen shops were important because they played a social and cultural role within the Italian community in Birmingham. Within the category of work discussed in this section, board and lodging house keeping was by far the most common type of occupation among St. Bartholomew Italians, who took in both Italian and non-Italian boarders.

Each of the occupations (retailing, and board and lodging house keeping) were predominantly small enterprises which were run by women in the Quarter, and this was primarily because these types of work provided them with an income whilst also allowing them to continue with their domestic role.

Terrazzo work

Of principal importance to the St. Bartholomew Italian community at the end of the 1920s, was the introduction of terrazzo work, which had the potential to provide a dependable income and was less risky than self-employment in either ice-cream or organ-grinding types of work. Information about Italian terrazzo workers, their work or the organisation of their labour and society is generally sparse.[84] Yet, it

---

[83]SGM2022.

[84]See Sponza, *Realities and Images*, p 91; Colpi, *Italian Factor*, p 41-2. Terrazzo work is believed to have begun in the north eastern region of Italy, called Fruili "hundreds of years ago" and then spread throughout Europe during the last two centuries: Correspondence between Mr. Don Slade, Secretary of the National Federation of Terrazzo, Marble and Mosaic Specialists and the writer.

is known that these workers were employed from around the 1870s, in small numbers throughout England and Wales, to build decorative floors and staircases in the grandiose civic buildings characteristic of the Victorian era.[85]

Only one terrazzo worker lived in the St. Bartholomew's parish, in the nineteenth century.[86] However, by 1916 terrazzo workers comprised 18% of the total employed St. Bartholomew Italian male workforce[87] and, judging from information given by respondents, by the middle of the 1920s it is highly probable that they comprised more than a half. During the inter-war period probably in excess of eight terrazzo flooring companies were established in Birmingham, and there were others in Manchester and London.[88] These companies provided sub-contract labour to builders all over Britain and benefited from the growth in the building trade which occurred from the middle of the 1920s.[89] The majority of terrazzo companies in Birmingham were medium sized,[90] and owned by northern Italians who recruited their skilled workers directly from Italy.

---

[85]It is possible Italians were employed to work on the B'ham School of Art and Design, in 1861. Terrazzo became popular with architects during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries because, in addition to being decorative, terrazzo surfaces are extremely hard-wearing and functional and ideal for general flooring, staircases, and especially areas well used, such as civic buildings, hospitals, shops and cinema and hotel entrances.

[86]George Wimbusli, aged forty, lived in Fox Street with his English wife and five B'ham born children. Although it is evident they had lived in B'ham since as least 1877, the 1891census seems to have been the first time he was recorded. Wimbusli is not registered in the census as 'Italian' but it is highly probable he was given his Italiante name. More significantly is his occupation was a "mosaic tile fixer", which was learned only among Fruilani in the nineteenth century: *Census, 1891.*

[87]The Aliens Registers do not make it clear if these men worked on terrazzo contracts during the war, or if they were working in other occupations: *Aliens Registers.*

[88]Terrazzo companies tended to specialise in one type of work. For example, Cecconi Brothers laid shop doorways: MSM1013.

[89]Terrazzo workers were present in relatively high numbers in Manchester but as the demand for their work declined during the first two decades of the twentieth century, they moved away: Colpi, *Italian Factor*, p 75. A few of these workers came to B'ham in 1916: *Aliens Registers.*

[90]For example, Jacquanello and Sons, Panicali Brothers, Pavino Flooring, Cecconi Brothers, Standard Pavements, Marbelino Company and Venetian Flooring, and Marbello and Durus from Manchester, also had branch offices in Birmingham. *Kelly's*

Two types of workers were used in the terrazzo trade: the craftsman or 'layer' and the labourer or 'polisher'. Laying terrazzo was a craft that took approximately three to four years to learn and involved bedding a pattern of small, coloured, marble squares within a surrounding ebonite strip.[91] This was a skill found mostly among men who originated from the villages of Fanna, Sequals, Spilimbergo, Solombero and Cavasso Nuovo in Northern Italy. When they came to Birmingham these men and their families lived about a mile away from the Italian Quarter, in the Bradford Street area of the city.[92]

Even during the period when terrazzo became popular in Britain, during the first half of the twentieth century, Fruilani (as they became known) dominated the trade because they were reluctant to train anyone who did not originate from northern Italy. Fruilani kept their skills a secret and would go to great lengths to prevent others learning terrazzo. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these workers would erect screens around themselves in order to prevent other builders learning their trade. However, it is more likely that the screens were there to prevent their work being spoiled by people walking across newly laid surfaces.

For every two terrazzo 'layers' there was one 'polisher' who was responsible for mixing materials, grouting and polishing the finished surface. Until polishing machines were introduced just before the beginning of World War Two, the whole terrazzo process was done by hand.[93]

> "When I first started they (polishers) used to polish it (the terrazzo) with a *Galara*, a big long stick and at the end it had pieces of carborundum stone and they used to rub the floors by hand."[94]

Commercial Trades Directory, 1930-1938.

[91]Terrazzo workers also laid 'composition' floors which consisted of sawdust, magnesite and colouring mixed together: RFM2024.

[92]Many of the northern Italians lived in nuclear family households around the Digbeth and Camp Hill area of the city.

[93]MMM2026.

[94]It was not until the end of the 1930s polishing machines were used in the trade: *Ibid.*

Labourers or polishers in Birmingham were usually recruited from among the southern Italians who lived in the Quarter.

Most terrazzo workers in Birmingham were not members of trades unions, despite numerous attempts to recruit them made by the General Builders' and Carpenters' Unions.[95] The reason why they did not become trades union members were twofold; first, many employers disliked the potential threat of interference from trades unions in their businesses, and second, Fruilani had their own method of protecting their jobs and so felt they did not need the support of a union. This they did by deliberately restricting the number of men they trained to become terrazzo layers and in this way sought to protect themselves against over-manning. The northern Italians used their skill as a bargaining tool and safeguard, and so unemployment among them was relatively rare. As one respondent, who became a terrazzo floor layer like his father, explained:

> "Apart from when the war started, then we was virtually without work, I can't remember dad ever being unemployed. All the friends kept together and they kept the decent workers. And then what it was also, there was friendship between the companies, and the bosses used to know each other personally and they used to keep them (skilled labour) on. If you was a hard worker they would try to keep you on."[96]

There were conscious attempts to provide full-time employment for these skilled workers, many of whom had come to Britain under contract, which meant that keeping them here without work was uneconomical for their employers.[97] However, the southern Italians who were employed as labourers and polishers had very little protection against unemployment.

---

[95]On sites where trades union members only were allowed to work terrazzo company managers would instruct their workers to say their union cards were, "at the office": MMM2026. Some terrazzo workers did belong to the Builders' Trade Workers Society, which had its head office in London: Colpi, *Italian Factor*, p 96.
[96]RFM2024.
[97]MSM1013.

There was an element of animosity between the northern and southern Italians which was an extension of the regional socio-economic differences that had existed since before the geographical and political unification of Italy in the 1860s. Lesser educated, darker skinned and more often poorer, the southern Italians were looked down on by many of their northern cousins.[98] The northern Italian terrazzo layers operated a closed shop and even refused to train other Italians if they considered their origins were inappropriate.[99] Consequently, southern Italians employed in this occupation struggled against the determination of the northern Italians not to train them to become skilled workers.

> "Now the north daint like us, and if you went to work for 'em, they wouldn't let you in the trade. But, when we went, my generation, we got more sense."[100]

Through the persistence of the second generation of St. Bartholomew Italians, who began to work in the trade from around the end of the 1920s, southern Italians were gradually allowed to become floor layers. Even so, although the northern Italians eventually gave way and permitted non-Fruilani into their trade, they remained selective about who did the skilled work, and the types of jobs they were given to do, as one St. Bartholomew Italian explained:

> "We worked at Stourport Power Station and there, there used to be a bank of dynamos. Well, these particular dynamos, they used to explode with a big flash and then start up. Now this fella, ... he got a bit frightened ... and he said, "you can do them." I said, "Oh, no. If I'm no good to do it when there's no danger, I'm no good to do it when there is!" And that's how it went on, and eventually we went into the trade."[101]

---

[98]RFM2024. Respondent MSM2013 claimed that southern Italians just did not have the correct temperament to work in the terrazzo trade.
[99] Colpi, *Italian Factor*, p 85.
[100]MMM2026.
[101]*Ibid.*

Although many St. Bartholomew Italians later became terrazzo layers, it seems very few served an apprenticeship in the way the Fruilani had.[102]

The St. Bartholomew Italian labourers were abundant and therefore had little protection against unemployment. The organisation of the recruitment of labourers varied between companies, but those who specialised in small works, tended to employ labourers and polishers on a weekly basis.

> "See Monday morning you always hadda go in the yard. The gaffer 'ud come 'round and say er, "you, and you, go to this job. You and you do this job. I'm afraid you'll 'ave to go home lads." Oh it was very hard for the labourers, as was called the polishers, very hard for them."[103]

Until just after World War Two companies who secured large contracts out of town would send skilled workers from Birmingham and recruit polishers and labourers locally by going to the town's labour exchange.[104] Out of town work was preferred by the skilled workers because in addition to their standard wages and overtime they were paid a weekly lodgings allowance.[105]

Data concerning terrazzo workers' wages has been difficult to obtain. No documentary evidence was located and none of the respondents were old enough to remember what the wages were before the 1920s. However, respondents who worked in the trade during the 1920s and 1930s have provided fairly consistent accounts of the hourly rates they were paid, and these have been used in Table 10 to estimate the wages of skilled and unskilled terrazzo workers.

---

[102]At least one company refused altogether to train apprentices because they had been made to pay compensation to an apprentice who claimed unfair dismissal. Ibid. Another St. Bartholomew Italian terrazzo worker said he did not serve an apprenticeship, he 'picked up' the trade watching the skilled men he worked with: HZM2005.

[103]MMM2026.

[104]MSM2013.

[105]If a job needed to be completed quickly, or even if the new floor was taking a long time to dry, skilled workers would work 70 hours per week and sometimes would even work throughout the night. *Ibid.*

Table 10. The wages of skilled and unskilled terrazzo workers, 1903-1939 [106]

Year	Full-time wages of skilled Terrazzo workers	Full-time wages of unskilled Terrazzo workers
1903	24s-27s (120p -135p)	N/A
1920s	70s (350p)	N/A
1930-1935	99s -117s (495p - 585p)	70s (350p)
1939	120s-140s(600p-700p)	70s (350p)

Table 10 shows the full-time wages of skilled and unskilled terrazzo workers during the period 1903 to 1939. As indicated, for a sixty hour week,[107] skilled terrazzo workers earned considerably more than their unskilled colleagues. Furthermore, terrazzo workers of any skill could earn more than workers in other types of employment in Britain. In 1914 the wage of the average British worker was 28/- (140p), which was less than half the wage earned by an unskilled terrazzo worker. By 1939 the average weekly wage in Britain had risen considerably to 64/- (320p). Even so, this was still less than those received by unskilled terrazzo workers.[108] Furthermore, the income received by unskilled terrazzo workers was considerably higher than the estimated subsistence level of 45/- (225p) per week, in 1929.[109] However, the wages of unskilled workers was dependent on the availability of work, and during periods of under-employment in the terrazzo trade the second generation returned to ice-cream work to supplement their income.

---

[106]For 1903 wages see, *MOH Report for Finsbury*: cited by Sponza, *Realities and Images*, p 91. For skilled workers' wages in 1920s see HZM2009; for skilled workers' wages in 1930s see GSM1013 and RFM2024 and for unskilled workers' wages see MMM2026 and RFM2024.
[107]During the 1930s normal working hours were 7am to 6pm, half hour breakfast and lunch, 6 days each week. MSM1013.
[108] Benson, *Working Class in Britain*, p 53.
[109]See this chapter, footnote 32.

Factory workers

Table 9, shown earlier in this chapter, illustrated that only 4 St. Bartholomew Italians were employed in local factories in 1891, but that in 1916 there were 48. Local factory work is the only type of work indicated in Table 9 (which shows the occupations most common among St. Bartholomew Italians), which was neither Italianate in nature nor run by Italians. These figures tend to imply a radical change had occurred in the occupational structure of St. Bartholomew Italians during the period 1891 to 1916, but as previously mentioned, these figures must be treated with caution.

World War One interrupted normal working patterns and the labour shortages created by enlistment created more employment opportunities for St. Bartholomew Italians. In 1916, 32 of the 48 men and women from the Italian Quarter who were employed in factories worked as labourers in munitions factories, such as the British Small Arms Co., and the Electric Ordnance Depot.[110] Being employed as dilutees gave the St. Bartholomew Italians an opportunity to work alongside British workers probably for the first time. It is likely that this experience brought them a number of benefits, such as the acquisition of work and social skills formerly unfamiliar to them, because until this time, the majority of St. Bartholomew Italians were employed by other Italians or were self-employed. Undoubtedly, the most important advantage of this work was regular wages. Working as labourers men earned between 22/10d (114p) and 29/- (145p), and in 1915, some women received wages of over £2 a week, depending on the type of work they did.[111] Even if the St. Bartholomew Italians had been paid the lowest weekly wage, in comparison with the income derived from organ-grinding and ice-cream work, their wages were, if not among the highest they had received, certainly the most reliable. However, it is probable that their experience working in British industry was short-lived, and although they gained new skills it is

---

[110]Six St. Bartholomew Italian women were also employed by a Holders' Brewery as bottle labellers: *Aliens Registers.*

[111] Stevenson, *Social History of Britain,* pp 79-80.

improbable they were put into practice; no evidence has been found to suggest that first generation St. Bartholomew Italians were employed in non-Italian industries after the war.

Other than during World War One only a very few of the first, and a small minority of the second generations of St. Bartholomew male Italians were employed in non-Italian or non-Italianate owned businesses. Even during periods of unemployment or when they were under-employed as street musicians, ice-cream manufacturers and sellers and terrazzo workers, they tended not to obtain work outside the Quarter, but instead diversified into penny capitalist type enterprises. Mr. G's father, who was usually a full-time ice-cream manufacturer and vendor, struggled to make a living early in the 1930s so he converted his ice-cream cart into a barrow and became a temporary fresh fish seller.[112] When diversification was not feasible the St. Bartholomew Italians sometimes found work through contacts such as neighbours, friends and relatives, and when Mrs.B's father became unemployed during the 1920s he worked in his father-in-law's fish shop.[113]

No evidence has been found to suggest that first generation St. Bartholomew Italian women worked in businesses other than those which were Italian owned. However, working outside the Quarter in companies not owned or run by Italians was fairly common among second generation single women. The circumstances in which most single women were likely to have been employed were at companies where other female relatives or Italian friends worked. This was encouraged by their parents because working together women acted as chaperones for each other.[114] In one family where there were four daughters; the oldest was kept at home to look after the "babies" and her sisters became seamstresses. When each sister left school they followed the older one to work at the same dress shop:

---

[112]JGM3027.
[113]EBF2001.
[114]BEF3011.

> "My father wouldn't let us go into a factory because there was men. It's true that is."[115]

Working in non-Italianate occupations or Italian owned businesses was more common among third generation St. Bartholomew Italians than for either of the previous two. During the 1930s the attitudes of many of the third generation changed from those held by their grandparents and some of their parents:

> "As they progressed, the children (third generation) didn't want to know about ice-cream."[116]

There were several reasons for their reluctance to work in that industry, and one of them was their desire to escape the stereotypical image given to the St. Bartholomew Italians by locals that they were all ice-cream workers. Mr. V, a bookbinder in a local English company during the late 1920s, described the reactions of his colleagues towards him each Monday morning when he went to work:

> "There'd be snide remarks ..."Hey, Ice-cream, tek yer van out the wikend?"[117]

However, third generation St. Bartholomew Italians also wanted the type of occupations where there was an apprenticeship, or at least a regular wage. The third generation were different from previous generations of St. Bartholomew Italians who probably spoke Italian in the home and spoke English with an accent. The younger generation had been educated and socialised in Britain and therefore had greater employment options open to them in the local non-Italian industries and they wanted to take advantage of these. Opportunities to obtain local work were fully exploited by males and females from the Italian Quarter and they were often helped to obtain work by relatives[118] and friends.[119] Mr. P was offered work as an apprentice in a local furniture factory after the local priest had spoken to the owner:

---

[115] GLF2003.
[116] JGM3027.
[117] FVM3002.
[118] EBF3001.
[119] NPM3009.

> "... my first job was at a place called Perry's next to the St. Michael's church where Father Daly was, and he had all of his furniture from there."[120]

An additional attraction of working for local non-Italianate or Italian owned businesses was the comparative independence it offered. For even working in a factory which was located close to or inside the Italian Quarter meant that the third generation were free from the restrictions of working from home and being under the constant supervision of the family.

Even so, working among non-Italians also had some disadvantages, as was indicated earlier by Mr. V, and many St. Bartholomew Italians had to cope with hostility from colleagues. The experiences of the St. Bartholomew Italians in relation to worker animosity will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Conclusion

This chapter has revealed important differences existed in the occupational structure of Italians who lived in the larger communities in Britain and those who lived in the small community of St. Bartholomew Italians. In Birmingham the range of occupations was much narrower than it was elsewhere, and broadly speaking the St. Bartholomew Italians were engaged in three types of work: street music, ice-cream and terrazzo.

Information about occupations in the Quarter was sufficiently abundant to enable a detailed account of the working practices and conditions among the St. Bartholomew Italians. However, a much less clear indication of incomes was provided, and this was because the types of work in which the St. Bartholomew Italians were employed were irregular. Working in occupations which were either part-time or intermittent meant wages were inconsistent, and this factor together with a general lack of wage data has meant that only estimated incomes were possible.

---

[120]LPM3007.

Even so, the available information strongly suggests that the income of the majority of families in the Quarter was either on or below the poverty line.

Four distinct, but overlapping occupational phases have been identified in the Quarter during the period. The first of these was organ-grinding which although common among the St. Bartholomew Italians during the early decades of the establishment of the Quarter, gradually declined during the period. The reduction in the number of street musicians, in part, was due to the development occupations in the ice-cream industry among the St. Bartholomew Italians. The lure of the ice-cream business was its potential to provide a lucrative and independent form of employment in which the whole family could be employed, thus keeping them together.

The ice-cream industry was the most important type of work undertaken in the Quarter, for not only did it provide a domestic industry, but it was also a micro-economy on which the majority of St. Bartholomew Italians depended. Subsidiary trades supported the ice-cream workers and, in turn, their wages were spent at the local Italian shops. The demise of the ice-cream trade during the 1920s disrupted the family domestic unit of production, and therefore had social and economic implications in the Quarter. However, this change was not lamented by everyone in the Quarter. Indeed, the introduction of terrazzo work was welcomed by the second and third generations of St. Bartholomew Italians because it had the potential to earn higher wages than had previously been possible. Furthermore, working in the ice-cream trade had come to stereotype Italians and Britain and was an image from which the third generation wanted to be disassociated. It was for this reason, and the fact that they wanted regular employment that the majority of third generation St. Bartholomew Italians sought work outside the Quarter, in non-Italian owned businesses.

The chapter which follows will examine the community, family and neighbourhood relation to St. Bartholomew Italian men, women and children during three generations.

Chapter 5 - COMMUNITY, FAMILY AND NEIGHBOURHOOD

As discussed in Chapter 1, past research has claimed that within the individual Italian communities in Britain there existed a strong "community spirit" which was allied closely to an ethnic group identity. This is believed to have emanated from the first generation of Italians who came to Britain and established their communities based on regional ties. The inference has been that the strong ethnic identity of the first generation permeated to later generations and was responsible for keeping communities together. In addition to the influence of the first generation, researchers have also emphasised the role of formal social organisations and societies and religious and educational institutions as methods of forming and sustaining a strong ethnic group identity. Although it is highly likely that the first generation of Italians and organisations, societies and institutions had a role to play in shaping and maintaining identity within individual communities, research into this aspect of community life remains limited. The conclusions drawn have been based on restricted researches void of investigations into informal social community interaction.

The aims of this chapter are to investigate various aspects of social interaction within the St. Bartholomew Italian community, which includes both formal and informal society. It is hoped that an in-depth study of community life will enable an examination of the role of formal social organisations and religious and educational institutions within the community. Furthermore, by investigating informal elements of the community, such as family, gender roles and neighbourhood interaction, it will be possible to draw some conclusions about their potential to strengthen group identity in the Quarter. In so doing the findings of this chapter will provide both insight into the social organisation of the community and the systems which were implemented by the St. Bartholomew Italians to cope with poverty. Because this chapter is investigating aspects of community life which have not previously been studied in detail comparisons cannot be drawn with Italian communities elsewhere. However, there is abundant information about British working-class community life and examples will be

used in this chapter to compare and contrast life between the St. Bartholomew Italian community and British working-class communities.

Chapter 5 is considerably longer than any other in this thesis: this is felt to be entirely justified because of the extensive range and detailed examination of topics being discussed. The chapter consists of two sections: the first examines the formal social organisations and societies and religious and educational institutions within the Italian community, and the second investigates the St. Bartholomew Italian family and neighbourhood in relation to gender and generations.

Italian Formal Social Organisations in Birmingham

For more than a century a large number of small and large Italian formal social organisations have existed within the Italian community in Britain These organisations were both national and local, and concerned with providing welfare assistance, pursing Italian culture and politics and religion and education. With the exception of religious and educational organisations, very little evidence has been found to suggest the presence of Italian formal social organisations in Birmingham, or that more than only a small proportion of the St. Bartholomew Italian population were members of the organisations which existed.

Welfare organisations

One of the most successful Italian organisations in Britain, at the beginning of the twentieth century, was the *Societa Italiana di Mutuo Soccorso* (IMAS),[1] its purpose was to provide sickness and death benefits for its Italian members. This society had a large membership in Manchester[2] and further branches were established

---

[1]This club was formed on 31.7.1902. The society claimed to have no political or religious allegiances and was a non-profit making organisation which provided benefits for its male-only members. I would like to thank Mr. S. DiFelice for the information about this society.

[2]A significant proportion of Italians in Manchester were craftsmen and skilled worker: T. Colpi, *The Italian Factor*, Edinburgh, 1991, p 75. It is probable these men did not experience unemployment and underemployment to the same extent as the unskilled

in Birmingham, Glasgow and London. The ability of this society to pay benefits was made possible by the regular and comparatively high weekly subscriptions paid by members.[3]

Links existed between the Birmingham and Manchester branches until at least 1927,[4] yet very little information about the Birmingham branch has been found.[5] The IMAS was familiar to only one respondent, and it is highly likely that membership among the St. Bartholomew Italians was low.[6] An explanation for the possible lack of support for this branch of the organisation in Birmingham may have been the inability of St. Bartholomew Italians to meet the weekly subscriptions.[7] For, as shown in the last chapter employment was intermittent, even for the wealthiest among the St. Bartholomew Italians workers in the terrazzo trade.[8] Another reason for the lack of

---

St. Bartholomew Italians, therefore it is likely they could afford IMAS's weekly subscriptions.

[3]Literature about friendly societies is limited, but it seems that the IMAS was fairly typical of the organisations and benefits provided by most in Britain: S. Cordery, "Friendly Societies and the Discourse of Respectable Britain, 1825-1875", *Journal of British Studies*, 34, 1995, p 36.

[4]The B'ham branch of IMAS probably lacked funds, since in 1927 they requested the loan of the Society's flag from the Manchester branch. Confirmed by S. DiFelice.

[5]Before sickness benefits were paid a claimant had to be examined by the Society's doctor and to have been off work for several weeks. Members were not eligible for benefits until six months subscriptions had been paid, at 6d per week (plus 2/6d (12.5p) membership fee). In addition to sickness benefits funeral expenses of up to £8 were paid to widows. Information provided by S. DiFelice.

[6]One of the oldest respondents interviewed for this research vaguely remembered his father paying a weekly subscription of 6d to a sick club c1920, which was collected in the "Golden Lion" public house. It is probable Eugene DeFelice, who lived in the Quarter and who had relatives living in Manchester, was the chairman of this club: CAM3011.

[7]Of course under-employment or low paid work were not features unique to Italians, street traders or terrazzo workers. Many thousands of English workers suffered similarly, and were therefore unable to pay the regular subscriptions necessary to enjoy the benefits provided by friendly societies during hard times.

[8]Other welfare clubs existed in the neighbourhood from the end of the nineteenth century, some of which had connections with the Roman Catholic church, such as B'ham Roman Catholic Friendly Society (c1890-1935): B'ham Catholic Archdiocesan Archive, Ref. M50 and M55. Conditions of admission and entrance fees varied between clubs. The Catholic Sick Club. established in 1795 by Rev. Mr.Nutt of St. Peter's Church, Broad Street, charged between 1/- and £5 entrance fee, and the weekly subscription was 1d. Unlike the IMAS, wives were also allowed to join this club:

success of the IMAS in Birmingham could have been linked to its lack of leadership. Until at least World War Two, the Manchester IMAS was led by educated and influential middle-class Italians, who used their connections in the city to promote the society, and possibly to increase its funds.[9] It is unlikely that the Birmingham branch had a similar leadership, since there appear to have been very few middle-class Italians living in the city.[10]

B'ham Catholic Magazine, Oct, 1913. It is also possible that a club named the, 'Sick and Dividend Society' was organised by St. Michael's RC. Church: *Archdiocesan Archive Register.*

[9]The President of IMAS in Manchester was Professor Colombo Toledano: A. Rae, *Manchester's Little Italy*, Richardson, 1988, p 30.

[10]There were very few Italian middle-class families living in B'ham during the first half of the twentieth century. The Poncia family were one: although it is not known if they were members of the societies mentioned in this chapter, their work among poor Catholics is evident: *Catholic Magazine*, March, 1913. The members of the Italian Vice Consulate in B'ham were another group of middle-class Italians about whom little information has been found. There was also another Italian, Mr. E.A. Olivieri, J.P., who is said to have founded the B'ham Catholic Association and was President of the Italian Circle. In his obituary in 1907 mention was made of the help he gave to "The Italian Colony ... especially at the time when the street musicians and ice-cream vendors chiefly resided in St. Bartholomew's Ward. He did much to improve their social conditions, and started for their benefit a club, which was carried on under the auspices of the parish clergy of the Roman Catholic communion": *B'ham Daily Mail*, 1.4.1907. Unfortunately, the Oratory was unable to provide further details about Mr. Olivieri or the societies he is said to have initiated. Dr. J. Sharp, B'ham Archdiocesan Archivist, has confirmed that the B'ham Catholic Association existed from at least 1855. See also, *Catholic Magazine*, March, 1913. The members of the Italian Vice Consulate in B'ham were another group of middle-class Italians. There was also another Italian, Mr. E.A. Olivieri, J.P., who is said to have founded the B'ham Catholic Association and was President of the Italian Circle. In his obituary in 1907 mention was made of the help he gave to "The Italian Colony ... especially at the time when the street musicians and ice-cream vendors chiefly resided in St. Bartholomew's Ward. He did much to improve their social conditions, and started for their benefit a club, which was carried on under the auspices of the parish clergy of the Roman Catholic communion": *B'ham Daily Mail*, 1.4.1907. Unfortunately, the Oratory were unable to provide further details about Mr. Olivieri or the societies he is said to have initiated. Dr. J. Sharp, B'ham Archdiocesan Archivist, has confirmed that the B'ham Catholic Association existed from at least 1855.

Cultural and political organisations

Two Italian organisations concerned with culture and politics have been identified in Birmingham. These were the Birmingham Italian Society (BIS) and the Birmingham Anglo-Italian Society[11] which were patronised by a handful of Italians who lived in the city. Although the President of the BIS was from Naples, the majority of members were northern Italians who were employed in the terrazzo trade, and who lived in the Bradford Street area of the city.[12] Of these two organisations only the BIS appears to have had any members living in the Italian Quarter and these were generally the wealthiest of the St. Bartholomew Italians, numbering probably no more than four or five.[13] One respondent whose northern Italian father regularly attended the BIS described it as a club where,

> "They'd have a drink and a dance, and a chat. It would be that more than anything. I mean these people talked of work ... a lot worked for the same companies..."

---

[11]An unsuccessful appeal for further information about these societies was made in the *B'ham Historian* October, 1998: C. Volante, "The Italian Community in B'ham", *B'ham Historian*, October, 1998. Unfortunately very little information has been located about either of these organisations, quite possibly because at the beginning of World War Two the records of many Italian clubs and societies were destroyed in an attempt to protect Italians from suspicion of being involved in Fascism. The B'ham Italian Society, was reported to have had two hundred Italian members in 1928: *B'ham Daily Mail*, 13.1.28. The B'ham Anglo-Italian Society was reported to have been established in about 1927: *B'ham Daily Mail*, 27.9.27.

[12]The President of the BIS was V. Pontone. Pontone was awarded the title of "Chevalier of the Star of Merit, of work in foreign countries" (sic), in honour of the work he did for fascism: *B'ham Evening Despatch*, 10.11.33. Within the membership of the BIS were a small number of Italian Vice Consulate officials, and a small number terrazzo workers from the northern Italian community who lived in Bradford Street: EMF2016 and RFM2024. Only one or two southern Italians appear to have been involved in these clubs: EBF2001.

[13]For example V. Pontone owned a cafe and ice-cream shop in the Quarter during the 1930s: *Kelly's Trades Directories, 1930-1938*.

In the late 1920s both the BIS and the Birmingham Anglo-Italian Society received local publicity. These organisations were visited by Italian government officials and royalty, who were there to promote Mussolini's campaign to unite the Italian diaspora and encourage a closer identity between Italians world-wide.[14] One of Mussolini's aims was to establish a common language among Italians,[15] and establish 'schools' in countries where Italians had settled, so that their children could be taught to speak Italian.[16] As a result, weekly Italian language lessons were held at St. Michael's RC school, in the Quarter, and it is highly probable that the members of the BIS were involved in the organisation of these classes.[17]

The language lessons received by St. Bartholomew Italian children were only moderately successful. Discipline during the lessons was very poor and consequently most of the pupils learned very little Italian. Most of the thirty or forty children who attended regarded the time merely as an opportunity to meet up with friends in the evening.[18] However, it is probable the teacher of these classes had Fascist links: among internees at the beginning of World War Two there were a small number of men who, as children during the 1930s, had been taken on holiday to Italy as rewards for their regular attendance at these classes:

---

[14]It seems there were several visits made to B'ham by members of the Italian government and royal family. One of the earliest of these was made in January, 1927 when Prince Don Piero Colonna visited the Italian Quarter in B'ham and attended a dance at the Guildhall situated within St. Michael's School: *B'ham Post*, 6.1.27. During the visits speeches were made by the visitors about their admiration for Britain, and Italy's loyalty to Britain. These reassurances followed Mussolini's take-over of the Italian government and a conference held in 1924 in which 58 nations were called for a discussion about the Italian immigrants living in their countries: Colpi, *Italian Factor*, p 87.

[15]Until the 1860s Italy was divided into regions all of which spoke their own language or dialect.

[16]Children born to Italian fathers are considered under Italian law as Italian subjects, irrespective of where they are born. As well as in B'ham, schools were located in London, Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool and Cardiff: Colpi, *Italian Factor*, p 95.

[17]A photograph taken just prior to World War Two shows the members of the BIS and among them is the priest who taught the children to speak Italian.

[18]LVM3028 and LPM3007.

> "Oh a lot of us went (to Italy). That was through the Italian government. I think the Wolverhampton priest had something to do with it, because he used to teach us Italian."[19]

With the exception of the children who were selected to visit Italy, there was only minimal contact between Italians, Italy and the St. Bartholomew Italians. Most respondents said they had been indifferent to Fascism during the 1920s and 1930s. However, it is very difficult to assess what the extent of sympathy towards Fascism was in the Quarter. Access to government information is restricted,[20] it is likely that respondents may have hidden their real feelings about Fascism during interviews. Certainly some members of the St. Bartholomew Italian population were suspicious about Fascism and the attempts the BIS made to involve them during the late 1920s and early 1930s.[21] It is also clear that there were members of that society living in the Quarter, and yet none of the respondents provided details about who they had been. Loyalty was no doubt a part of their reluctance, but apprehension was another.

The reaction of the British government at the beginning of World War Two, and the internment of St. Bartholomew Italians shocked many in the Italian community. The sudden arrest of men in the Quarter was badly organised and their handling by the police was insensitive and clumsy, and many respondents still feel unable to reconcile the fact that parents in the Quarter were put under house arrest, whilst their sons served in the British Army.[22] The attitude shown towards St. Bartholomew Italians and the poor treatment received by themselves and their families led them to reconsider their loyalties. A respondent, who was interned at the age of seventeen, said he was confused about whether he was Italian or English:

---

[19]EMF2016.
[20]Aliens Registers held by the police during World War Two have been requested but permission was refused by the Police Chief Superintendent on the grounds that members of the public were not allowed access to police offices. It is probable that these registers contain details about St. Bartholomew Italians who were suspected of being Fascist sympathisers.
[21]LVM3028 said his father had warned his sons not to join the BIS, but he had allowed them to join the language classes.
[22]For example: LVM3028 and WFF2008.

> "At the time I s'pose I'd be Italian for being roped in. I was mad and so worked up, so I was glad I was Italian. But, before that I was born of English father. Born in England and I'm English."[23]

Religious and educational institutions

The overwhelming majority of pupils who attended the language classes also went to St. Michael's school, which was affiliated to the parish church of the same name. In the 1920s and 1930s the church and school were a multi-cultural mixture of English, Irish and Italian Catholics. The closely linked church and school endeavoured to provide spiritual and educational guidance, but they also had a much wider function and significance providing, "a total community embracing both the religious and the secular".[24] A respondent explained:

> "The church was the centre of the community. Not just for Italians, but for the whole area."[25]

Church attendance among the St. Bartholomew Italians varied between generations and within gender groups. It is probable that, for many of the females living in the Quarter, particularly among the first and second generations, the church was their only means of socialising formally.

> "We went to church every Sunday, and I used to go to Benediction. That's all. That was our life. On'y us girls."[26]

Although the majority of St. Bartholomew Italians attended church on special occasions, many of the first and second generation women were very religious, and some went daily to Mass,[27]

---

[23]NPM3009.
[24]C. Chinn, *The Anatomy of a Working-Class Neighbourhood, West Sparkbrook, 1871-1914*, PhD Thesis, B'ham University, 1986, p 258.
[25]JGM3027.
[26]EBF2020.

> "... me mother was staunch Catholic, she used to go seven mornings a week. Cos' there was Mass every morning, 7 o'clock."[28]

Women and girls tended to go to church and its day and evening prayer meetings much more than boys or men.[29] For some who were employed in the ice-cream business on Saturdays and Sundays church attendance may have been difficult. This did not excuse them as far as the church was concerned, and the clergy were disappointed with the general lack of effort among men to attend the church and its clubs, which were organised from at least the early part of the twentieth century.[30]

As children, almost every respondent said they had regularly attended Mass, and during the late 1920s and early 1930s some of the male respondents became altar boys.[31] There was a lot of pressure on children to attend church regularly and although some said they had been genuinely interested in religion, most were forced to attend church by parents, and particularly by grandparents.

> "They were strict (about religion) is so much as they was governed by me grandparents.. She (grandmother) used to take them (children) to church, and if you wasn't there on a Sunday morning, y'know, she used to ask you what was going on."[32]

---

[27]The grandmother of GSF3017 was unable to attend church because of her arthritis; the parish priest therefore came to her house daily to perform Mass. Examples of respondents who had female relatives who attended church daily: NPM3009; WFF2008 and EBF2020.

[28]LPM3007.

[29]Women and girls were praised for their attendance at church and its clubs, but appeals were made to encourage men and boys. See for example, *St. Michael's Magazine*, Jan, 1912 and Apr, 1912. In January and October of 1914 the St. Bartholomew Italian mothers and girls were awarded prizes for good attendance at the clubs organised by the church: *St. Michael's Magazine*, 1914.

[30]The Catholic Magazine indicates that clubs held at other churches had a better male attendance than did St. Michael's.

[31]Other examples, LPM3007; JGM3027; MSM1013; NPM3009.

[32]FVM3002.

Coercion not only came from their own families, but also from St Michael's school which was affiliated to the church. Almost every respondent remembered at least one occasion when they had been questioned on Monday morning about why they had not been to church the previous day and some recalcitrants were caned by the teacher[33] and others made to feel guilty about their behaviour.

> "They sherracked (shouted at) ya, y'know! They (teachers) looked down on you, sort of thing. You wasn't wanted. "Shuv 'im out!" Pushed you aside."[34]

After St. Bartholomew Italians left school and were working, most were given a choice about attending church and its clubs.[35]

Strenuous attempts were made by the church to involve all of the Catholic population living in the St. Bartholomew neighbourhood, irrespective of their ethnicity. At the beginning of the twentieth century the Catholic church was concerned about its decreasing congregations,[36] and fears that parishioners were converting resulted in the clergy attempting to restrict interaction between Catholics and non-Catholics. As a consequence, non-Catholics were deliberately excluded from Catholic social gatherings.[37] This practice created problems for St. Bartholomew Italians whose marriage partners were not Catholics. Chapter three demonstrated how, from the 1920s, almost two-thirds of marriages among St. Bartholomew Italians were non-endogamous, and many non-Italian spouses were non-Catholics before marriage. The priest sometimes initially refused to marry mixed religion couples and it

---

[33] Verbal information from L.J. Volante.
[34] CAM3010. See also MLF2014.
[35] NPM3009, LVM3028, FVM3002.
[36] In 1911 approximately 2,000 Roman Catholics lived within the parish of St. Michael's church, but by 1923 the total had decreased to around 800: *B'ham Roman Catholic Diocesan Directory*.
[37] St. Francis Church, Lozells printed the following statement, "Bring your Catholic friends by all means, and we will make them welcome, but understand please that these Social Gatherings are not intended for non-Catholics": *B'ham Catholic Magazine*, Oct. 1913. It has been suggested that the Catholic religion acted to isolate the Italian community in Britain: B. Sereni, *They Took the High Road*, Barga, 1974, p 15.

was only after they reached a compromise with the priest that the marriage was allowed.[38]

Table 11. The percentage of baptised people with Italianate family names recorded in St. Michael's RC church registers, 1891-1938.

Date	Both godparents Italian	One godparent Italian	Neither godparent Italian	Not known
1891-1900	87	8	3	2
1901-1910	92	8	0	0
1911-1920	90	0	7	3
1921-1930	87	5	6	2
1931-1938	81	5	13	1

As a further means of preventing leakage and maintaining religious commitment, the church encouraged parents to have only Catholic godparents for their children. Table 11 shows the distribution of godparents at the baptisms of children with Italianate family names who were recorded in the St. Michael's RC church baptism registers, 1891-1938. In the course of collating this information problems were experienced in relation to identifying who were St. Bartholomew Italians.[39] These registers provided very few clues about the identity or place of residence of the baptised and godparents, and the only consistent and reliable information which suggested their identity was their family name. Therefore, for the purpose of this research it seemed reasonable to consider everyone recorded in these registers who had an Italianate family name as being of Italian origin or descent. It is realised that the term is ambiguous nevertheless 'Italian' has been used in Table 11 to denote St. Bartholomew Italian godparents and others who are believed to have been

---

[38]The church tended to refuse to marry couples unless they were both Catholic. In many examples given by respondents this meant that partners had to have religious instruction and take Holy Communion before their marriage was allowed. In other examples, the priest permitted the marriage on the condition that children would be baptised as Catholics. For example: NPM3009; CAM3010; LGF3006;VIF2004.
[39]A very small number of the later entries in the registers included the addresses of children being baptised.

Italianate. Of course neither the fact that St. Bartholomew Italians were of Italian origin or descent, nor that they lived in the Italian Quarter indicates their religion. However, the vast majority of Italians are of the Catholic faith and in 1914 the parish magazine emphasised the fact that Italians were, "the only people who consistently arrange to have *both godparents*" chosen from the Catholic faith.[40] All of those people with Italianate names recorded in the registers have been assumed St. Bartholomew Italians, primarily because St. Michael's RC church was the parish church for the Italian Quarter.

Table 11 reveals the consistently high percentage of Italian godparents chosen by the St. Bartholomew Italian parents. The choice of godparents was, and still is, based on cultural as well as religious preference among Italians and is widely recognised as a position of honour which has a special significance:

> "... christenings are a big thing with Italians. I mean the Godfathert. When you're an Italian Godfather you're a member of the family, y'know. It's a big thing if you're Italian, being a Godfather."[41]

The church was concerned ostensibly with the Catholic devotion of the neighbourhood, irrespective of ethnicity. However it often simultaneously reinforced Italian culture, as has been demonstrated in relation to godparents. Another example was the annual trip to the shrine at Holywell, which was organised by and for the Italian community and was attended by St. Bartholomew Italians of all generations. Whilst this annual trip was seen as an important religious event, it was also one which brought the Italians in Birmingham together to socialise.[42] Although men and women

---

[40] *St. Michael's Magazine*, Oct. 1914.
[41] CAM3010.
[42] Trips to Holywell were attended by men, women and children to celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Assumption, on 15th August. Coaches were hired so that as many B'ham Italians who wanted to go could do so. Even during World War One, when travel was restricted and permission had to be given by the police to let them leave B'ham, a large number of St. Bartholomew Italians visited the shrine: *Aliens Registers.*

went to Holywell it had a special relevance for women, and particularly the first generation.[43] Mrs. L suggested that the importance of Holywell was that "it was like a holiday to my mother".[44] A similar response was made by the St. Bartholomew Italians to join the Masses given in Italian by the Missionary who, periodically, visited St. Michael's church. Special efforts to attend these Masses were made by many of the first generation:

> "Most times they went to church (was) when the Italian Missionary came over. About once a year he used to preach in Italian and bang and bump on the pulpit. There was a good attendance. But it was nice to hear someone preach in their own language, and they all meet one another there."[45]

The religious, cultural and social significance of this event is obvious. It was especially important for the parents of the above respondent who did not attend St. Michael's RC church regularly because, in 1913, they moved away from the Quarter, and this limited their ability to socialise with relatives who remained there. Other occasions when the Italian community united were to take part in the various religious processions which occurred on saints' days. All generations of St. Bartholomew Italians were involved in these parades which brought together Catholics and Italians from all over the city. At these events the St. Bartholomew Italians wore their national and religious costumes, and therefore provided vivid ethnic displays to people who lived outside the

---

[43]EBF2001; GLF2003; EBF2020; LGF3006.

[44]MLF2014. The chapel and synagogue for Irish and Jews (respectively) have been noted as being important places which provided familiarity through language and culture. Within this atmosphere, which reminded them of home, alienism could be forgotten: W.J.Fishman, "Allies in the Promised Land?", A.J. Kershen (ed), *The Promised Land? The Migrant Experience in a Capital City*, Avebury, 1997, p 44. It has been suggested that religion is "the most important way in which ethnicity is maintained, existing amongst virtually all communities, no matter what their size": P. Panayi, *Immigrants, Ethnicity and Racism in Britain, 1815-1945*, Manchester U.P, 1994, p 80. Religious establishments have also been seen as places where individuality is abandoned in favour of group welfare and identity: G.D. Suttles, *The Social Order of the Slum: Ethnicity and Territory in the Inner City*, London, 1968, p 42.

[45]MLF2014. Also GLF2003 also made a special effort to go to church and take her children to listen to the Italian Missionary.

Quarter.[46] Women of the first generation wore their national costumes daily for at least the first decade of their settlement of the Italian Quarter, but this practice ceased among women of subsequent generations.[47]

During the late 1920s and 1930s St. Michael's church and school also organised social evenings, usually dances, for youths, which were held in the Guildhall within the school, and in the rooms above the church. In addition, a sports club was established and was attended by a large proportion of third generation St. Bartholomew Italian boys, who regularly competed against Catholic schools from all over Birmingham in boxing and football matches.[48] To the school and church, these events were sporting activities, yet among the boys who competed they were opportunities to reinforce simultaneously neighbourhood alliances with school friends and establish the school's reputation and hierarchy within the working-class Catholic society.[49] These institutions not only provided religion, education and leisure activities for the St. Bartholomew Italians, but also provided a few with the rare opportunity of having a holiday. During the month of August in 1937 and 1938, about thirty Catholic boys from the neighbourhood were taken to Ireland to experience rural life on a farm which was owned by the family of the local priest. The cost of the holiday was subsidised by the church, but unfortunately the onset of war prevented further trips.[50]

---

[46]At most other times it was only the first generation St. Bartholomew Italian women who wore the national costume, which consisted of a distinctive black apron: MLF2014; BEF2020; LGF3006.

[47]See article in the *B'ham Daily Argus* 8.9.99 and a photograph taken 1.6.01, reprinted in D. McCulla, *Victorian and Edwardian B'ham*. Even during the late 1920s first generation wore their costumes for special occasions. For example, the visit of Italian Prince Don Piero Colonna: *B'ham Daily Mail*, 6.1.27.

[48]A notice was given in the parish magazine that the club would "reform" in 1913. However, little evidence of its activities before the late 1920s has been located: *Catholic Magazine*, Oct, 1913.

[49]After competitions it was usual for fights to take place between the boys of the different neighbourhood schools: LVM3028, JGM3027.

[50]The holidays were organised by Father Daly, overseen by Mr. McKay, the sports teacher from St. Michael's School, and cost around 30/- (£1.50) per boy. A few of the ex-pupils also went along, presumably to help ensure the younger ones behaved

Despite the fact that evidence about the formal social organisation of the St. Bartholomew Italian community is sparse, particularly in relation to welfare associations and cultural and ethnic societies, it has been shown that such organisations were probably patronised by only a minority of St. Bartholomew Italians. Much more clearly demonstrated in this chapter has been the greater significance of the religious and educational institutions of St. Michael's RC church and school through which Italian culture, language and rites of passage were exercised. The church was more important for first generation females than any other single group within the St. Bartholomew Italian population, for whom its function was social as well as religious. By attending special occasions at the church, such as the Italian Masses and visits to Holywell, links between Italians throughout Birmingham were maintained. These events, together with the various sporting and social activities organised by the church and school, also acted to reinforce their religious and neighbourhood group identity and often provided an opportunity for the St. Bartholomew Italians to exhibit their distinctive ethnicity to people living outside the Quarter.

Informal social organisation within the St. Bartholomew Italian community

One of the most potent representations of Italians is the family and its importance, yet curiously, it is one of the least researched aspects of Italian immigration in Britain. This research has already made a limited but important contribution to knowledge about Italian immigrant history in relation to work and incomes. It will make further a offering in the remainder of this chapter by investigating the Italian Quarter in Birmingham in relation to family and neighbourhood within the context of gender and generations.

---

themselves: LVM3028; JGM3027; NPM3009.

The family

Chapter 3 demonstrated how the Italian Quarter was formed by the settlement of Italians who originated from the region of Frosinone. The first and some of the second generation of St. Bartholomew Italians maintained kin ties through immigration and marriage and made conscious attempts to retain endogamy in the Quarter. This was important to many of the early Italians in the Quarter because they wanted to delay acculturation and provide themselves with some security.

Many among the first and second generations of St. Bartholomew Italians considered ethnically mixed marriages to be risky. This was primarily because they believed non-Italian spouses, particularly women, would want to introduce their own culture and that Italian culture would be unacceptable to them. Many shared the view that Italian men,

> "try to be too bossy. Like, go get me suit ready, go get me this ready. That's how they are! See, the Italian women go like little lambs, whereas an English woman. Oh! See the Italian women have been kept down with (by) the men, except those few that learned not to be told."[51]

Attitudes about the role of women had their origins in Italy, where it was usual practice in southern Italian households for the extended family to work and live together. This way of life not only provided security for less-able or ageing family members, but ensured parental control was maintained over younger generations.[52] Because of their need for financial security parents were particularly hostile towards the idea of sons moving away from home after marriage, since it might reduce their ability to help when needed.

---

[51]MSM1013.

[52]It has been suggested that ethnically mixed marriages do not work, because "foreigners in general have little idea how an extended Italian family works and first generation immigrants wanted to make the kind of alliance (for their children) that they understood": P. Tullio, *North of Naples, South of Rome*, Lilliput, 1994, p 54.

The custom of families living closely together, even after children had married was continued in the Italian Quarter by the first and second generation, but was less popular among the third generation. Shortly after the end of World War One, Mrs F took her English husband to live in the Quarter with her Italian parents, and in time, she expected that her sons would do the same with their spouses. The refusal of one son to do so caused animosity between members of the family and resulted in him having to make frequent visits to see his mother:

> "I went to live with Cath, at Cath's place when I got married. I used to pop in to see her (mom) everyday. I used to see her when I popped round home dinner time, and I'd pop round home at night before I went home. Just to keep the peace. That's all it was, really."[53]

This respondent believed that similar attitudes were common among other St. Bartholomew Italians, but more so among Italian mothers. To mothers of the first and second generations keeping the family together was more important than just prolonging Italian culture; it was also a crucial part of their survival strategy

It was another custom in southern Italy that wives went to live with their husband's family, and were expected to follow the social mores of his family and live respectfully.[54] If she brought the family name into disrepute through unacceptable behaviour, the husband would be rebuked by the community and his family for being unable to control his wife.[55] A similar attitude was shared by a number of the first and of the second generation St. Bartholomew Italians who showed little sympathy towards wives who did not conform.[56] There existed within the

---

[53]NPM3009. See also: LVM3028. BEF3011 stated that her father had remained in the Quarter after marriage in order to help provide extra income for his parents who had several young children.

[54]D. I. Kertzer, D.P. Godan and N. Karweit, "Kinship Beyond the household in a nineteenth century Italian Town", *Community and Change*, 7, 1992, p 107. This custom differs from that among English families whereby wives took husbands to live with her parents: M. Young and P. Wilmott, *Family and Kinship in East London*, Penguin, 1965.

[55]Tullio, *North of Naples.*

[56]See in particular: EBF2020 and BEF3011.

Quarter a strong mother-son relationship: even after a son married and established his own household St. Bartholomew Italian mothers did not relinquish their considerable influence. It was neither unacceptable nor uncommon for daughters-in-law to be supervised by their mother-in-law when her son was at work.[57] An example of this was given by Mrs.H whose parents lived very close to her father's family in the Quarter, and when he arrived home from work her grandmother reported to him her daughter-in-law's activities. Behaviour which was considered unacceptable, such as not doing housework, could result in her receiving a beating.[58]

> "A lot of wives got beat up then. Italian and English men who'd had a drink. They took it for granted then. Where had women got to run to? They'd got nowhere had they? They'd gotta stay with their husband and the children. They had to put up with it."[59]

Domestic violence did occur within the Italian Quarter but, as revealed in this testimony, it was not confined to the St. Bartholomew Italian community. Almost every respondent confirmed the prevalence of violence in that area of the city. However, they also suggested that much of the violence there occurred between English couples, and particularly among those living in the nearby English lodging houses, where it was not uncommon for the police to be called to settle

---

[57]This was not uncommon practice among southern Italians who migrated to America: V. Yans McLaughlin, "Patterns of Work and Family Organisation: Buffalo's Italians", T.K. Rabb and R.I. Rothberg (eds), *The Family in History*, Harper, 1971, p 112.

[58]NHF3018. A similar system existed between women in British working-class neighbourhoods. The reputation women had within their community was important and could influence the survival of their families. Judged by neighbours, women were accepted only if they complied with local values, such as dress, sexual habits, supervision of children, etc. These customs were 'understood' within a neighbourhood and therefore neighbours and women collectively created and shared in the policing of their community through such methods: E. Ross, "Survival Networks: Women's Neighbourhood Sharing in London Before World War One", *History Workshop*, 15, !983, p 5.

[59]NHF3018. See also: FOF2021.

disturbances.[60] During the period many working-class households considered violence as a legitimate means of control which helped husbands and fathers to maintain their authority.[61] The extent of domestic violence in the Quarter is difficult to assess, because although it was discussed by some respondents, it was a topic most felt uncomfortable talking about, especially when it had happened in their own family.

Chapter 4 showed that within families in the Quarter who were employed in the ice-cream industry, men, women and children were expected to contribute their labour.[62] Yet, there was a quite different attitude towards household responsibilities. Gender roles in relation to housework were fairly uniform in most homes, and throughout the period women and girls undertook the bulk of the daily chores. Mrs. B recalled how she and her mother had done the housework between them:

> "When I used to come home from school, my mother used to be in the wash house washing, and I used to stand there, with a candle in the dark, waiting for her to finish." [63]

Most married women and school girls, and in some families even single working women, were restricted to the home to help with housework and childminding chores.[64] Numerous respondents agreed that the expectations imposed on daughters

---

[60]The majority of Italians who came to the Quarter in search of lodgings during the twentieth century were accommodated in private Italian homes and therefore did not frequent the lodging houses used by English couples. In the neighbourhood there were also non-Italian lodging houses some respondents claimed were brothels, (NPM3007; MMM2028) as well as there being men's and women's hostels: FOF2021.

[61]For a discussion about violence within British working-class families: N. Tomes, "A Torrent of Abuse: Crimes of Violence Between Working-class Men and Women," *Journal of Social History*, 11, 1978, p 338. Married women and children were considered the property of their husbands and fathers and therefore viewed as his to do with as he wanted: P. Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society*, Routledge, 1988, p 68.

[62]One of the few mentions of Italian women and the family in past research was made by Sereni, who acknowledged the lack of recognition of the important role women played in managing and keeping the family together: Sereni, *They Took the High Road*, p 25.

[63]EBF2020.

[64]Sponza states that, "girls ... were subjected to a more rigorous code of conduct than

to remain at home after school and work were unfair, because whilst they were kept in their brothers were comparatively free of household responsibilities.[65] Furthermore, in families where there were both sons and daughters, it was often understood that boys should not have any household responsibilities, and that sisters would not only help their mother, but would also do household chores for their brothers. Mrs. B had three sisters who all had household responsibilities, but a brother, who was fairly unrestricted by their parents, who,

> "... had the freedom of the city, he did. See, that's how they were at one time. A son was the boss, and he could do what he liked."[66]

Among the St. Bartholomew Italians, in common with many English families during the period, gender roles existed, but there were variations between homes about the accepted households mores. Not every family practised such rigid gender roles; especially in homes where there were no daughters, sons were expected to do a share of the housework.[67] In Mr. P's family each of the five sons had their own housework chores, which they continued to do even after they had left school and were working.

> "I used to clean the front room every Thursday. Even when I was courtin'. That was my job, the frontroom... we'd all got our jobs ..."[68]

---

would have been applied if they were brought up in Italy, because of the strong suspicion aroused in peasant people by the 'temptations' and corruption of a big city": Sponza, *Realities and Images, p* 236.

[65]Male as well as female respondents acknowledged the differing attitudes towards girls shown by their parents and grandparents who allowed greater independence of boys: EBF2020; BEF3011; MDF3012; NHF3018 and RFM3024. This attitude also prevailed among Italians who lived in London: E. Salvoni, *Elana: A Life in Soho*, London, 1990, p 27.

[66]EB2020. Respondent MDF3012 stated that males had to be served first at mealtimes. See also: GLF2003.

[67]Chinn, *Anatomy of a Working-Class Neighbourhood*, p 166.

[68]NPM3009.

Furthermore, even though the bulk of the cooking was usually done by women, it was not uncommon for Italian men to cook family meals on special occasions, or on particular days of the week.

> "Father always used to be cooking on a Saturday night. Mother 'ud be down the market, or somewhere, y'know waiting for the bargains... And father 'ud be cooking, and he used to do steak and all sorts of things, and tomatoes and all the rest of it..."[69]

However, it was equally as likely in St. Bartholomew Italian families that men did no housework at all, nor even showed much interest in the home.[70]

In addition to carrying out most of the housework, it was also women's responsibility to raise and discipline the children.[71]

> "My mother was quite a strict person. Not that I regret it now, but we used to regret it in them days."[72]

Although St. Bartholomew Italian mothers had authority within the home they remained subservient to their husbands, or the male head of the household. In Italy not only was this a recognised cultural tradition in the predominantly patriarchal households there, but it was also law.[73] A similar but informal arrangement existed in

---

[69]EBF2020. See also: VIF2004 and WFM2008. In B'ham Saturday nights were the time when women would shop in the Bull Ring for cheap cuts of meat: C. Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives. Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1890-1939,* Manchester U. P, 1988, p 66.

[70]Although respondents complained that housework was left to the women to do, some demonstrated conflicting attitudes, for often they also showed their disapproval of men childminding (BEF3011; EBF2020) and, in some examples, men doing any house work at all: LPM3007.

[71]Southern Italians who migrated to America showed similar attitudes to those in B'ham towards women's household responsibilities. See Yans McLaughlin, "Buffalo's Italians", p 119.

[72]RFM2024.

[73]L. Caldwell, "Church, State and Family: the Women's Movement in Italy", A.Kuhn and A. Wolpe, (eds), *Feminism and Materialism,* Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, p 71; S. Wood, *Italian Women's Writing,* Althone, 1995, p 7; A. Bravo, "Italian

many British working-class families, based on the assumption that fathers and male heads of households were those on whom the family was financially dependent. For as long as women did not try to interfere in the economic organisation of the family, or the freedom of the male head of household they were permitted control of the home.[74] Through this organisation of the household mothers were empowered. It was for this reason that some St. Bartholomew Italian women held the strong belief that males should not do housework, because allowing them to do so was an infringement of their power which would therefore undermine their authority in the home.[75]

Family expenditure

Controlling the family budget was another responsibility held by mothers and one which was particularly difficult in households where the family was large and the income low. In the last chapter it was shown how mothers would try to increase the family's income by taking out a barrel organ or selling ice-cream. For some this was not feasible and so they looked to other ways of coping with the problems of feeding and clothing their families with insufficient money. Mrs. D was one of eleven children who, together with their parents, lived with her paternal grandparents in their house in Banbury Street. Her father was employed by her grandfather in the demolition trade, and when work was available they were well paid. However,

---

Peasant Women and the First World War," C. Emsley, A. Marwick and W. Simpson (eds), *War, Peace and Social Change in Twentieth Century Europe*, Open University, 1989.

[74]This was also true in some British working-class households: C. Steedman, *The Tidy House*, Virago, 1982 and E. Roberts, *A Woman's Place. An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890-1940*, Blackwell, 1984.

[75]The subordinate role of St. Bartholomew Italian women is not being disputed here, yet within their subordination they had some power. The extent of women's authority in this context has been identified in other cultures. See: C. Dauphin, et al, in J. Wallach-Scott, (ed), *Feminism and History*, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp 572-9; J. Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960*, Routledge, 1994, p 70; S. D'Cruze, "Women and the Family", J. Purvis (ed), *Women's History, Britain, 1850-1945*, UCL, 1995, p 63.

contracts were irregular and Mrs. D recalled that during periods of under-employment the family barely had enough money to buy food. Even including Mrs. D's wages, her family's income was inadequate:

> "I had me first new coat and I had it weekly 1/- a week. Navy blue nap - I thought I was the cat's whiskers! So I fetched it on the Friday night ... I wore it on the Sunday. Comes 'ome from work (on the Monday and) went upstairs for me coat. No coat was there. I said, "Mom, where's me coat?" Mom couldn't answer me. I went up and down them stairs about six times! I'll always remember. Our mom said, "I'll 'ave to tell ya'. I've pawned it." I cried broken hearted! I said, "Everybody 'ull know it's bin in the pawnshop, it'll be all creased! She said, "Don't cry bab, I paid a penny for it to goo on 'anger."[76]

The local pawnshop was used by many mothers in the Quarter to temporarily alleviate the problem of insufficient housekeeping money.[77] In working-class districts it has been noted that, "every neighbourhood had one or more pawnshops and women's use of them varied".[78] However, it has been forcefully argued that using the pawnshops was not necessarily indicative of poverty.[79] Lack of details about wages and incomes during the period up to the 1920s makes it difficult to assess poverty levels in the Quarter, or to what extent poverty may have been caused by under-employment or unemployment. Mr. M, who was born in 1914, suggested the St. Bartholomew Italians were like many others in Birmingham, and were hit hard by unemployment during the late 1920s.

> "It was difficult to get work at that time. In fact, I can tell you now, me and a layer were the only two working for months and months ... and we used to come 'ome for dinner. All the out-of-works used to sit on De Felice's (shop) step.[80]

---

[76] MDF3012.
[77] NPM3009; VIF2004; LGF3006 and FOF2021.
[78] D'Cruze, "Women and the Family", p 64; Chinn, *Anatomy of a Working-Class Neighbourhood*, p 244.
[79] M. Tebbutt, *Making Ends Meet. Pawnbroking and Working-Class Credit*, New York, 1983, p 15.
[80] MMM2026.

The introduction of terrazzo work at the end of the 1920s, provided employment for a large number of St. Bartholomew Italian men. Even so, for some in the Quarter, financial improvement did not occur until the late 1930s.

> "The chaps were always hanging about on street corners. That was early on, but a couple of years before the war, as I remember it, they were just getting back on their feet."[81]

Sometimes insufficient housekeeping money was the result of an inadequate family income, but this was not always so, particularly in the context of child poverty. The mother of Mrs. D was regularly kept short of housekeeping money because her father's needs took priority over his family. As a result the whole family were afraid of him and sometimes they did not get enough to eat:

> "He did have a good wage, but he never give it to mom. But he never used to booze or gamble it, but he'd gotta 'ave the best of everything. He used to have sandwiches, I think it was a quarter of boiled ham, every day of his life, and ten Gold Flake."[82]

From the early twentieth century St. Bartholomew Italian children were identified in a local charity report as being among the poorest in the city,[83] and during the 1920s and 1930s St. Michael's School took the unusual step of providing breakfast for the poorest of children living in the area.[84] Despite the obvious poverty in the Quarter respondents regularly stated during interviews that *they* had not been poor as children. Respondents supported this claim by making a comparison between themselves and other families who lived in the neighbourhood, and were satisfied they had not been

---

[81]The testimony of Mr. V (c1913-1999) suggests that during World War One St. Bartholomew Italians were financially better off than they were in the 1920s. This was probably as a consequence of their employment in the munitions industries: FVM3002.
[82]MDF3012.
[83]*Pentland's Street Robins Charity Annual Reports, 1902-1905.*
[84]LGF2006.

poor because the English were poorer. Another criterion they used to assess poverty levels in the Quarter was the amount of food they were given, and even though many said they had sufficient to eat, it is clear that their diet was not good. One respondent explained what they considered real poverty was:

> "We were poor, but not ... let's face it, I can't remember being *poor*, poor. We always had our food on the table, I never had Daily Mail boots. I never had anything like that."[85]

Respondents' denial of being poor was not because they were ashamed or were trying to hide the fact. They openly acknowledged their mothers use of the pawnshop as a means of stretching the budget and for buying clothing.

In the psyche of St. Bartholomew Italians, being poor was seldom equated with material deprivation. For them *real* poverty was associated with unsociable habits and, in particular, being dirty. This connection was seldom referred to explicitly but was made unconsciously. In replies to questions about their experiences of poverty respondents often linked together details about their living standards with descriptions of how hard women had worked to keep homes and families clean:

> "I was fortunate because our granny and them provided. But I must say most of the washing was as white as snow, because they (mothers) used to have to get 'em as white as snow to tek 'em to Polly Bragg's, the pawn shop in Bordesley Street."[86]

The extent of poverty differed between families in the Quarter, and one of the most common periods when poverty was at its worst was when families had young children,

---

[85]"Daily Mail boots" were donated by a local newspaper who ran appeals for money for the poor. It became apparent during narratives that the strong feelings associated with Daily Mail boots were the result of the humiliating, public scrutiny the children who were selected to receive these boots were subjected to by their teachers: VIF2004.

[86]VIF2004. Other examples of respondents who equated poverty with dirtiness: WFF2008; BEF3011; EBF2020; EBF2001.

and parents were dependent on a single wage.[87] Respondents' denials about not being poor as children were often undermined by their comments about the amount of help their family had received from grandparents. A few respondents had been 'granny reared' either temporarily when their parents worked, or because parents had been unable to cope.[88] The mother of Mrs. S had fifteen children and, unable to take care of them in the late 1920s, she was sent her to live with her maternal grandparents. No evidence has been found to suggest grandparents gave financial aid to their adult children, but it was common for them to provide food or cooked meals. Mrs. G's earliest recollection was of her grandmother's house in Bartholomew Street where she and her brothers used to go most school days for a lunch-time meal. Her father's parents, who did not live in the Quarter, also helped.

> "Well I think we were luckier than most because me grandmother who lived in Masshouse Lane, she'd got money, and while she was alive we never wanted."[89]

When children left school and became employed families began to benefit from their wages, but at the same time other financial circumstances changed. It was during this period that parents and children helped ageing grandparents who, without pensions and often unable to work full-time, relied on their younger family members to help with their work (in ways shown in the last chapter), and for financial assistance. Many St. Bartholomew Italian families organised relatives so that elderly family members where taken care of. Some families provided meals:

> " ...when me mother had this little house in Bartholomew Street, every evening I used to absolutely dread it. I used to have to take a big dish of spaghetti or a dinner to my grandfather, who lived round in Duddeston Row."[90]

---

[87]Identified among English families by S. Rowntree, *A Study of Town Life*, p 136.
[88]For example, see: FVM3002 and GSF3017.
[89]LGF2006. Other examples, VIF2004 and GS3017.
[90]EBF2001.

To ease their financial problems grandparents would sometimes move in to live with their adult children,[91] but, if they wanted to remain in their own homes, financial assistance was given, as in the example of one grandfather who was not eligible for a state pension. It had been her grandfather's ambition to one day become naturalised, but his income had not allowed this, so,

> "... all his grandchildren that was at work ... we went round and we collected enough money and we got him naturalised. So at least he was having a pension. Apart from that, he was just living on what his daughters could give him."[92]

His daughters were themselves married and had their own families to support, so giving financial assistance to their widowed father was, at times, a struggle.

This section of the chapter has shown that, for much of the period, St. Bartholomew Italian household organisation and responsibilities were largely left to females. Many of the families in the Quarter experienced poverty, even though few respondents acknowledged this for fear of appearing dirty. The extent of poverty was such that families relied on help from extended family members, and so the organisation of the family was geared towards inter-dependency, and provided financial, material and moral support. Financial help and aid in kind were part of the cultural practices within the Quarter, which remained fairly constant between first and second generation St. Bartholomew Italians. Although relief continued to be given by the third generation to older family members there was an increasing reluctance to continue with other traditions, especially those which restricted them to living in the Quarter.

---

[91]For example see: LVM3028 and GLF2003.
[92]MDF3012.

Neighbourhood

Respondents narratives suggest that the amount of social interaction between individuals within the neighbourhood varied throughout the period, and that it also differed between men and women. In general, behaviour that was deemed acceptable, or at least accepted in men, was totally inadmissible for women. With the exception of going to church and its clubs, it was not until after the 1920s that women began to socialise outside the home, and even the extent of their social interaction with neighbours was moderate.[93] The remainder of this chapter investigates the types and extent of social interaction in the Quarter. Because such different attitudes prevailed about what was considered acceptable behaviour, married women, girls and single women, boys and men will each be discussed separately.

Married Women

The amount and types of social interaction among St. Bartholomew Italian females were equally as common in Italian culture as they were in English working-class culture during the period.[94] One respondent explained,

> "That's how it used to go, the women used to, naturally, used to stop in the house. They were the family carers as you'd say. They cared for their families and that was it. That came first with the women, and the men didn't think much. They (men) thought of their families but they didn't help so much."[95]

---

[93]Some Italian clubs and organisations allowed women and children to attend special occasions. Even so their involvement was very limited.

[94]Women in Italy were restricted to the home and raising the family, and even after migration when opportunities for work occurred, they continued to be confined to the household environment: Yans McLaughlin, "Buffalo's Italians", p 124. In oral testimonies collected by the writer which were given by English women who had lived in rural and urban areas about life between the two World Wars, it was found that they too had a very limited social life in comparison with men. During the 1920s and 1930s, cultural mores were such that women spent most of their time in the home and with their family.

[95]LPM3007. It is suggested that British husbands and wives also led different lives to the extent, "that they failed to grasp the major concerns of each other's lives": Ross, "Survival Networks", p 5.

Respondents confirmed with regularity that St. Bartholomew Italian grandmothers and mothers had usually stayed at home, and that with the exception of family members, they had very limited contact with people living inside or outside the neighbourhood. A result of their close confinement to the Quarter and lack of communication with non-Italians was that the majority of first generation St. Bartholomew Italian women did not learn to speak English.[96]

> "The language was a barrier, don't forget, for the old uns, particularly. My gran, she couldn't speak a word of English, and she'd been here fifty, sixty years, but for some reason she never did. But granddad did."[97]

Their limited opportunities to learn English were coupled with their lack of incentive, for many of the first generation of St. Bartholomew Italians intended to stay in Britain only temporarily. Furthermore, retaining the Italian language in the Quarter was an important part of their ethnicity, because it served to bond together all of the St. Bartholomew Italian community and simultaneously demonstrate their distinctiveness to society outside. Earlier this chapter revealed the special efforts which were made by the first generation of St. Bartholomew Italians to attend church when the Missionary visited St. Michael's church, but even among the younger members of the community the Italian language was a part of their identity:

> "If you'd got any English in there (the Quarter), they was the outsiders! If you know what I mean. On a Sat'day morning, Sunday morning you'd be outside and they'd be talking Italian, not English. Doing the ice-cream.[98]

---

[96]There is some evidence that this led to a lack of confidence, and therefore when they needed to shop outside the Quarter they would go in pairs: MLF2014.
[97]JGM3027. Some second generation respondents stated that they had spoken no English at home, and that they had not learned to speak English until they went to school. For example, MLF2014; EMF2016 and GLF2003.
[98]NPM3009.

Even so, although the language helped to bond the St. Bartholomew Italian community, not being able to communicate created problems:

> "We went to the police station, y'know you had to sign, ... he (the policeman) was taking the micky out of me mother, cos me mother couldn't speak English. He said, "How many sons you got?" She said, "One, two, three, four ..." He said, "Stop. Just tell me!" He'd got no patience with her. We were practically illiterate.[99]

For most women living in the Quarter social interaction was limited to chatting to neighbours whilst washing in the brewhouse, or sitting on their doorstep on light nights in the summer. Yet although socialising between women neighbours was restricted it was understood that during times of family crisis, such as illness or during confinement, their help could be relied on:

> "...like if our mother had a baby, then the next door neighbour 'ud do that. 'Cos she was Italian, and then when her time come, our mother would do the same for her."[100]

Within the Quarter there were also people who helped others, perhaps because they had particular skills or could provide a service. Mrs. L's mother had been the unofficial midwife in the Quarter until her death in the early 1920s.[101] During the first twenty years of the existence of the Quarter, the padrone Antonio Frezza, who probably received some education in Britain, helped St. Bartholomew Italians with legal matters and also acted as interpreter.[102] From the 1920s, Mrs. F's mother, who was one of the few literate adults in the Quarter, and who could read and write in both

---

[99]HZM2005.
[100]EBF2020.
[101]MLF2014.
[102]At the end of a court case in which Frezza was not personally involved, he complained to the judge that he was repeatedly being asked by the police to interpret on behalf of the Italians, but that he was not being paid for the work. For other examples see: *B'ham Daily Post*, 12.4.05 and *B'ham Daily Post*, 19.9.05.

English and Italian, translated and wrote letters for others in the community.[103] Another occasion when help between St. Bartholomew Italians was expected and accepted was during periods of mourning. The Italian custom of keeping constant vigil over the body of the deceased temporarily suspended daily household tasks and so neighbours cooked meals for the mourning family.[104]

Whilst women like Mrs F's mother, who helped others in the Quarter, had the regular companionship of neighbours, and perhaps parents or siblings living in the Quarter, there were others who rarely had the opportunity to chat or socialise. For women brought to live in the Quarter by their husband from Italian communities elsewhere, or who were not Italian, life could be fairly solitary. A person's origin was important to the first and second generation of St. Bartholomew Italians, and anyone who was not from their region was likely to be perceived as an 'outsider'. This could lead to ostracision, as was Mrs D's grandmother' experience:

> "When our granddad come to Birmingham ... he was quite a nice looking man. But I think what 'appened was, that a lot of the Italians was expecting granddad to marry one of theirs (daughters). He didn't... so they never accepted our gran. Y'know how they are."[105]

Not only Mrs. D's grandmother, but for women generally in the Quarter life was fairly mundane. With the exception of the occasional meeting of neighbours, for most women, there were only family members for company for much of the time, and as a result they became heavily dependent on them.

Yet, despite their relative seclusion, many women of the first and second generations were reluctant to move to the suburbs, when demolition of the Italian Quarter became imminent, during the 1930s.[106] Mr. A's father had wanted to move

---

[103]WFF2008.
[104]WFF2008; NPM3009 and BEF2011.
[105]MDF3012.
[106]In a newspaper article similar sentiments were expressed by St. Bartholomew Italian women when the final decision was made to demolish the Quarter: *B'ham Daily Mail*, 30.1.34.

his wife and six children away from Bartholomew Street where they lived in a small house which had no mains connections.

> "He found another house at Stockland Green. It was a cul-de-sac, I'll never forget it. It was the end house and we moved out of Bartholomew Street. Took all the furniture up there. Put it in this house. My mother said, "I don't like this!" And all the furniture was took back!"[107]

For some women then, the Quarter was preferred to living elsewhere despite their comparative isolation, the treatment some women received from others in the Quarter and the slum and insanitary housing conditions.

Girls and single women

The large number of household responsibilities of females, and the limits imposed on their freedom, restricted their level of social interaction. In common with married women, single females of the first generation were mainly confined to the company of their families. Few changes occurred in the attitudes of second generation parents about the amount of freedom given to females, but some were allowed more opportunities to mix with non-Italians than was common among women of the previous generation. Interaction between non-Italians and second generation St. Bartholomew Italian women was more common among those unmarried women who worked outside the Quarter. Although the amount of leisure time they had was as restricted as that of the previous generation of women, a small number of second generation were allowed to visit the cinema, provided they were accompanied by family members or girlfriends.[108] Having been educated in Britain and working with non-Italians from outside the Quarter, many second generation respondents, who grew up in the late 1920s and 1930s, claimed to have socialised with English women, and to have had friends of both Italian and English origins.

---

[107] CAM3010. For other examples: MDF3012 and EBF2020.
[108] EBF2020; WFF2008 and MLF2014.

> "My best friend was English, she lived next door ... certainly my ratio of friends, English and Italian were about the same, y'know. There were English people amongst us, in the Quarter."[109]

With the exception of the period during World War One, interaction between the St. Bartholomew Italians and non-Italians probably began to occur with greater frequency from the 1920s than it had previously. Yet, it is evident from the use of the word "us" in Mrs. F's narrative, that she believed there was a distinction between the St. Bartholomew Italians and the non-Italians, and furthermore, that she regarded herself as Italian even though she had lived all of her life in Birmingham.

The limits of social freedom were extended for many of the third generation St. Bartholomew Italian single women, during the late 1920s and 1930s. Few of these women worked in the Quarter and more were allowed to go to dances at the church, in the neighbourhood and city centre. However, most parents continued to insist that daughters were accompanied by someone they knew, and often this was a brother, or male relative.

Men

Socialising for men and women was very different, both in relation to the amount of leisure time they had and how it was used. Independence was highly valued among St. Bartholomew Italian men who regarded it as their due, regardless of their marital status and family responsibilities. Wives had very little control over what husbands did, or with whom they associated.

> "They was the gaffers as far as they'd come in when they liked and go boozing and ... you hadn't gotta say nothing. They was the gaffers."[110]

Unlike girls and married women, who were almost always chaperoned when outside the home, men socialised in adult environments and separately from their families. The

---

[109]WFF20008. See also: MLF2014.
[110]NPM3009.

British working-class pub culture was adopted by men of all generations, but among the first and second generations it was more common for men to attend 'card parties':

> "Some, what they used to do, in the summer, they used to take it in turns. When it was my granddad's turn he used to have, y'know, the maiding tubs? Used to turn it upside down, put a board on it. They'd sit 'round it playing cards and drinking. But they wouldn't just come to the one place, it 'ud be me granddad's turn one week and then somebody else's. And it went round like that."[111]

These events took place within a selected number of St. Bartholomew Italian homes between men of all generations and were remembered by many respondents as noisy and boisterous occasions, that sometimes ended with a fight.[112] Although at least one respondent described these parties as 'terrible', most seemed to have accepted the fighting as inevitable, rather than frightening or shocking An explanation for their apparent indifference was that the following weekend the men would meet again to resume their games.[113]

Card parties, which were popular with the first and second generation of men, became less so among the third generation, who tended to favour the pub. However, even that generation continued to exclude St. Bartholomew Italian women from their social activities.

> "There wasn't many clubs round there. Pubs, everybody used to go in pubs. It was more the men, perhaps, occasionally (women), if there was a function."[114]

---

[111]LGF3006.
[112]EBF2001; VIF2004; LGF3006; WFF2008; NPM3009; MSM1013 and GSF3017.
[113]EBF2001. Mrs. B confirmed that although fights occurred the police were not usually called and although, "they'd fight like cats and dogs ... the next night they'd be playing cards together again".
[114]LPM3007. The large number of public houses in the St. Bartholomew's area became a concern to the local authorities and as a consequence of this sixteen licences were refused in 1905: *B'ham Daily Post*, 10.5.05.

Not all of the St. Bartholomew Italian men gambled or drank, and only a minority pursued these activities to excess, but among those married men who did, their life-style was undoubtedly a contributory factor in the extent of poverty experienced by their families.[115] A number of St. Bartholomew Italian men, throughout the generations, remained conservative in their attitude and prided themselves on being family men, who took their responsibilities seriously. One respondent described her father,

> "He didn't go out, he didn't drink. He was a family man, and that's what he was. He used to mend the shoes, he used to do things with us. He was a good father. He used to be in and if you needed anything, he was there."[116]

Boys

In common with adult men, there were few constraints or responsibilities imposed on boys and adolescents by parents concerning with whom, when and where they socialised. Boys were expected to respect their parents and to uphold the reputation of their families, but St. Bartholomew Italians also believed that males should have freedom to develop their independence. From at least the 1920s, some of the second generation older St. Bartholomew Italian youths spent some of their weekends outside the neighbourhood; more usually they congregated in all-Italian groups, in the centre of Birmingham.[117]

Among the third generation, attendance at St. Michael's sports and social club was common, but youths and boys of that generation also became members of street or neighbourhood gangs. This was not an uncommon practice among working-class boys during the 1930s,[118] but even so was one which created a lot of concern among St. Bartholomew Italian parents.

---

[115]MLF2014 claimed that her father went to the pub every night of the week.
[116]BEF3011.
[117]MMM2026.
[118]For details about the attitudes towards and activities of working-class street gangs see: G. Pearson, *Hooligan. A History of Respectable Fears*, Macmillan, 1991 and J. Walvin, *A Child's World. A Social History of English Childhood, 1800-1914*,

> "The gang was predominantly Catholic, but there was English in it as well. If some of their kids used to come over, y'know, and upset one of our kids. They was a little bit territorial. Silly things, any excuse for a fight."[119]

None of the third generation respondents who had been gang members believed they had criminal, ethnic or racial inclinations, and they stated that the relations between the St. Bartholomew Italians and their immediate non-Italian neighbours were amicable. Most third generation adolescents and boys from the Quarter did not mind socialising with the Irish and English who lived in the neighbourhood, and with whom they went to school. However, their parents often opposed this:

> "They wouldn't let them mix up with *anybody*. They said, the English children, they could go where they liked, do what they liked, they was not properly disciplined."[120]

The worry caused among St. Bartholomew Italian parents by the formation and antics of these gangs was considerable, and it is highly probable that one of the purposes of St. Michael's sports and social club and the holidays to Ireland, was to occupy the boys and to break up the gangs.[121]

Conclusion

This chapter has examined two types of society in the Italian Quarter, the formal and the informal. Despite the lack of information, it seems that very few formal organisations and societies were established or patronised by St. Bartholomew Italians. If this suggestion is true then the influence of these organisations and societies on either promoting a strong ethnic group identity or keeping together the community, was limited. However, in relation to religious and educational institutions within the

---

Penguin, 1982.
[119]RFM2024.
[120]CAM3010.
[121]JGM3027.

Quarter, the same conclusion cannot be drawn. St. Michael's church and school endeavoured to hold together the community using religion and culture, although neither their purpose nor intention was to promote Italian culture or ethnic identity.

The examination of informal society in the Italian Quarter revealed that cultural pursuits varied according to gender and generation. Among the first generation of St. Bartholomew Italian women Italian culture was vigorously upheld and evident through language, food, dress and the celebration of the rites of passage. These women used the ethnic bonds of the community as a survival strategy. Their attempts at keeping the community together included deliberately encouraging endogamy, delaying the process of acculturation, and trying to prevent the second and third generations of St. Bartholomew Italians leaving the Quarter. Such measures were adopted by these women in order to provided a measure of security and self-reassurance, which became particularly important as they grew older.

Ethnic identity among males of all generations was less crucial than for first generation St. Bartholomew Italian women. This, in part, was because males adapted rapidly to British working-class culture due to their socialisation outside the neighbourhood, where they mixed with non-Italians. Their exposure to non-Italian culture occurred at the local pubs and during their interaction with the British at work and, as a consequence, males tended to learn to speak English and become far more familiar with British working-class culture than women did. St. Bartholomew Italian women acculturated much more slowly than males, even though they were educated and socialised in British working-class surroundings, just as third generation males were. The differences in their ethnic identity was largely as a result of the cultural restrictions which kept women within the Quarter, but allowed males much more freedom and opportunities to socialise. Even so, although ethnicity varied between males and females, all generations participated in Italian culture in relation to food, and the celebration of the rites of passage.

Despite the variations in ethnic awareness and identity within the Quarter a strong group identity was evident among all generations and both men and women.

This was demonstrated through the testimonies of respondents who regularly distinguished between themselves and neighbours who were not consider to have been a part of the St. Bartholomew Italian community. More importantly the perceived differences between the St. Bartholomew Italians and the host society were brought sharply into focus during World War Two and the period of internment when the community gained strength through the support of others in the Quarter.

The maintenance of the community was also given impetus through the family. The organisation of St. Bartholomew Italian families and households initially resembled those in Italy, where extended family members worked and lived together in order to provide security to vulnerable family members. The similarities between family life in Italy and the Quarter were also evident concerning gender roles and familial hierarchies, where head of the household was the male and women controlled the family budget and were responsible for the day to day running of the home. However, among the second and third generations of St. Bartholomew Italians the organisation of the family also shared many similarities with the British working-class family, and in particular in relation to the methods used to cope with poverty and other crises, whereby family members tended to react to need instinctively, and the help given by neighbours was less reliable and more selective.

This chapter has identified the numerous internally generated influences on the St. Bartholomew Italian community. Chapter 6 will examine potential extraneous influences on the Quarter and investigate how the St. Bartholomew Italians were perceived by the host society.

Chapter 6 - PERCEPTIONS

A strong group identity such as that which existed among the St. Bartholomew Italians has been interpreted elsewhere as a response to marginalisation, and perhaps hostility. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, existing research rejects the idea that neither the strong group identity found within Italian communities nor their isolationist tendencies were the consequence of extraneous influences, and it has even been claimed that Italians were popular in Britain.

The latter opinion can be easily substantiated in relation to the success of the Italian ice-cream and catering industries established during the last decade of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. However, the Italians' successful production and development of consumer items and services does not tell us about how they were perceived as people. The idea that Italians were popular in Britain can be supported to an extent, if a comparison is made between the Italians and other ethnic groups such as the Irish and Jews. For Italians attracted very few comments from social observers, unlike the Irish and Jews who experienced sustained negative attention. Furthermore, neither widespread nor violent racial outbursts appear to have been a frequent occurrence between Italians and the indigenous population. Even so, the absence of reports and enquiries, and lack of written evidence concerning hostility against Italians in Britain do not prove animosity did not exist or that Italians were popular. Late Victorian and Edwardian documentary sources suggest that for at least some of the time, and regardless of nationality, all immigrants whose socio-economic status came within the category of working-class were regarded as 'undesirables'. Although violence and other racial incidents involving Italians were seldom reported, Britain was not devoid of such instances, nor did Italians escape racial abuse or opprobrious treatment.

At the end of the nineteenth century there occurred a rapid and large immigration of Europeans into Britain[1] which coincided with a growing awareness of numerous internal social, economic and political problems.[2] As the number of immigrants increased, even though their total population was comparatively low, so did the perception that they had created harmful influences and they emerged as the scapegoats within British society.[3] Beginning in the 1880s until at least 1920 official enquiries concluded immigrants were detrimental to the well being of the country, and campaigns ensued to reduce and restrict their entry into Britain.[4] However, not everyone agreed that legislation should be introduced, and as a result long drawn-out discussions occurred which received national and local publicity. Newspapers printed parliamentary debates verbatim and their contents were

---

[1]The exact number of immigrants in Britain was unknown during the nineteenth century and the claims that immigrant numbers were rising were based on the annual returns for immigrants entering Britain's ports. See, *The Times*, 9.9.91. However, these figures included people enroute to other parts of the world, as well as visitors and therefore did not provide a true reflection of the number of immigrants living in Britain.

[2]At the end of the nineteenth century the British economy "had stalled"; unskilled labour was showing militancy against their working conditions and pay, the most famous was the formation of the dockers' union and London Dockers' Strike, 1889. There was also a growing awareness of the poverty and squalor which existed in the larger towns and cities of Britain and a fear of the degeneration of society. Britain's dependency on the Empire underpinned its isolationism and suspicions about Europe: D. Cesarani, "An Alien Concept? The Continuity of Anti-Aliensim in British Society before 1940", *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol II, Nov. 1992; J.C. Bird, *The Control of Enemy Alien Civilians in Britain, 1914-1918*, 1986; G.R. Searle, "Eugenics and Politics in Britain, 1900-1914", *Science in History*, 3, Noordhoff, 1976.

[3]In the 1901 population census abstract it was stated that, "the increase of Foreign-born population, irrespective of nationality, is proceeding very much more rapidly than the increase of the general population". However, the census also confirmed that the number of immigrants in Britain was still comparatively low. Among the towns and cities having the highest rates of immigrants were Manchester with 22/1000 population and Tynemouth 21/1000 population. Only thirteen towns and cities in England and Wales had a proportion of foreigners exceeding 10/1000 population. B'ham was not one of these: *PP*, The Aliens Bill, 4th series, Vol 58, 23.5.98.

[4]Examples of enquiries: Select Committee on Emigration and Immigration, 1890; Royal Commission on Alien Immigration, 1903-4; Campaigns to introduce, amend or increase legislation: 1st reading of Aliens Bill, 1894; 2nd reading of Aliens Bill 1898; Aliens Act, 1905; Aliens (Prevention of Crime) Bill, 1911; Aliens Restrictions Act, 1914; Aliens Act 1919; Aliens Order, 1920.

discussed in editorials and readers' letters; also included were a series of medical and social reports all of which focused on the deleterious effects of immigrants in Britain.

The eventual introduction of legislation in 1905 did not dispel the fears held about immigrants nor the derogatory images which had become prevalent during the discussions leading up to the Act. Immigrants continued to be portrayed as having the worst possible traits of any social group. A campaign to increase immigration controls began shortly after the 1905 Act became law, and this continued until eventually, in 1920, provision was made for an annual review of immigration legislation.[5] From the late 1880s until at least the early 1920s immigrants received regular and widespread negative publicity which promoted the notions that they were responsible for displacing British labour, spreading disease and immorality, undermining law and order, and exploiting housing and welfare provisions in Britain. This chapter will demonstrate how, throughout the period, immigration and immigrants were major topics in newspapers. Journalists collected and editors printed even the most petty and ordinary, scandalous and sensationalist events in which immigrants were involved. In addition to the activities of the press, some politicians used the perceived ill-effects of immigrants and immigration to coerce voters, gain themselves publicity and further their own political agendas.[6] The images of immigrants which were presented to the

---

[5]Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act, 1919, was amended in 1920 with the Aliens Order which legislated that an annual review of immigration controls would be carried out henceforth.

[6]In an election speech in 1905 Chamberlain claimed, "immigration, ... consists of the poorest class, almost the refuse of Europe". This speech was made during the period when the final discussions on the Aliens Bill were taking place, and an election was imminent. The timing and contents of Chamberlain's speech suggest it was aimed at linking current public fears with obtaining votes: *B'ham Daily Post*, 6.5.1905. It has been argued that such practices were not uncommon, and that politicians frequently used anti-immigrant propaganda during electioneering to create a sense of common purpose and bond divided classes: Cesarani, "An Alien Concept?", p 27. In addition to the obvious support Chamberlain received from the local press in B'ham it has been suggested that the Daily Express also gave him supportive press coverage: M. Engel, *Tickle the Public. One Hundred Years of the Popular Press*, London, 1996, p 95.

public were derogatory[7] and at different times during the period and for different reasons, their perceived characteristics were given particular emphasis.[8]

At the same time that immigration was becoming a contentious, and widely publicised issue in Britain, the St. Bartholomew Italians were establishing their Quarter in Birmingham. The emergence of the second generation in the Quarter coincided with discussions about the introduction of immigration laws in Britain. This chapter will assess the perceptions held about the St. Bartholomew Italians throughout the period, in relation to work, poverty, hygiene, crime and culture. Documentary evidence provided by middle-class observers, including reports made by Medical Officers of Health and journalists, will be scrutinised. In addition, the experiences of St. Bartholomew Italians in relation to the reactions of the local working class will be discussed. This evidence will be used to answer the questions: how were Italians perceived in Birmingham, and were similar perceptions shared by all sections of Birmingham's society about the Italians who lived there?

Work

Among the activists leading the campaign for immigration restrictions at the end of the 1880s was the Board of Trade whose major anxiety was, "the importation of pauper and destitute aliens"[9] who, they believed, accepted conditions of 'sweated labour' and worked for reduced rates of pay, which they believed would ultimately lead to unemployment among British workers.[10] For much of the period under investigation similar beliefs existed about many different types of work and were not confined to only sweated trades, which employed a large number of Russian and Polish

---

[7]P. Panayi (ed), *Racial, Violence in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries*, 1996, p 18.
[8]K Lunn, *"Immigrants and British Labour's Response, 1870-1950", History Today*, Vol. 35, 1985, p 48.
[9]*PP*, Committee on Alien Immigration, 1889.
[10]It was never proven that immigrants undermined the local economy by cutting wages and offering their skills cheaply: C. Jones, *Immigration and Social Policy in Britain*, Tavistock, 1977, p 81.

Jews.[11] In several parts of England and Wales Italians and other immigrant groups experienced hostility from workers and violence sometimes occurred.[12]

The derogatory images of immigrants became widespread throughout the period through a combination of political speeches and newspaper reports. In Birmingham Joseph Chamberlain, a well known local politician and businessman during the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries, expressed derogatory opinions about immigrants and immigration which appeared in the local press.[13] Chamberlain had worked hard in the nineteenth century to improve Birmingham as a commercial centre and to raise its image within the country. His endeavours had earned him respect and influence among many of the lower middle-class in the city, the majority of whom were comprised the owners of small businesses and shops, traders and white-collar workers. F.M.L. Thompson has described these people as, "oppressed by the burden of rates on their businesses as well as their homes..." who found an ally in leaders such as Chamberlain.[14] As the owner of one of Birmingham's largest manufacturing companies, it was one of Chamberlain's main interests to protect

---

[11]Miners in Scotland protested about the employment of unskilled foreign labour who, they claimed, posed a severe threat because immigrants did not understand English or safety procedures: *B'ham Daily Post*, 7.10.04. The displacement of British men by foreign labour, and in particular children, was promoted in a lengthy article written by Robert Sherard, who disclosed that, "child slaves" were employed in B'ham, but he gave no firm evidence of this: *B'ham Daily Post*, 8.04.04.

[12]See for example, 'Race Riots in Cardiff', *B'ham Post*, 1.4.04 and 11.8.04; "Assaults on Jews at Limerick", *B'ham Post*, 16.4.04. Miners' Federation protest about use of foreign labour: *B'ham Post*, 7.10.04. Italians and locals fought at mines in Cumberland: *B'ham Post*, 10.10.05. Hostility occurred between locals and Poles and "coloured men" working in Lancashire mines: *B'ham Post*, 25.11.05; Chinese seamen in Liverpool: *B'ham Daily Gazette*, 8.4.11. The numerous anti-German riots in Britain during 1915 were often related to their retaining ownerships of businesses: *B'ham Post*, 14.5.15; Chinese labour on British ships: *B'ham Daily Mail*, 8/9.9.16. Fifteen English people went on strike because 9 Italians, French and Swiss were employed at a hotel in Leeds: "The Alien Cook", *B'ham Evening Despatch*, 20.11.19; "Conflict between Race Gangs in Carlisle": *B'ham Daily Post*; 10.7.25.

[13]Chamberlain was Mayor of B'ham, 1873-5; MP for the city, 1876-1910; President of the Board of Trade, 1880-5 and colonial secretary, 1895-1903.

[14]F.M.L. Thompson, *Cambridge Social History*, Vol.1, Cambridge U.P, 1990, p 66.

British industries and labour from foreign competition[15] and he became a vociferous advocate of the introduction of immigration legislation. [16] During 1904 and 1905 he criticised opponents of the introduction of the Aliens Act, and in a speech which was reported verbatim in the *Birmingham Daily Post* he warned that, "[T]he evils of immigration have increased in recent years... They (immigrants) come here and change the whole character of a district. The speech, the nationality of whole streets have been altered and the British work men have been driven by this ... competition ... from trades they previous occupied."[17] Chamberlain did not directly refer to Birmingham in this speech, yet in his capacity as a Member of Parliament for the city his perception that immigrants were a threat to workers were transmitted to local people.[18]

Antagonism among Italians and British workers probably occurred less often than between other ethnic groups. This was partly as a result of the predominance of Italians in street entertainment and catering occupations, in which there was very limited competition with British workers. Despite this, Italians were not immune to actions of hostility from disgruntled indigenous workers,[19] and the narratives of St. Bartholomew Italians indicate that animosity was experienced in various ways.

---

[15]Chamberlain had financial interests in Nettlefolds Ltd.

[16]Chamberlain fiercely believed in the maintenance of the British Empire and in particular Free Trade. He opposed Gladstone's attempts to give Home Rule to Ireland and broke with the Liberal Party to form the Unionists. Chamberlain objected to links with Europe and would not accept that a Free Trade policy would exacerbate tensions between Britain and the Continent.

[17]*B'ham Daily Post*, 16.12.04.

[18]Chamberlain's proposed method of dealing with immigrants coming to Britain was to deport them to East Africa so that they could establish a colony and practise their own religion and culture. He acknowledged that many immigrants were persecuted in their country of origin and were not responsible for the situations they experienced. He stated that he was not racist, but wanted to safeguard the interests of the British worker: *B'ham Daily Post*, 16.12.04.

[19]The Royal Commission on Alien Immigration included a lengthy deposition from the President of the Costermongers' Association of G. Britain, which stated that within a year the number of Italian costers had rapidly increased and threatened to make British costers redundant because of their meagre living standards, which meant they could charge much less for goods than native workers could. He also accused Italians of living in insanitary conditions and being violent. The latter allegations were disputed by another interviewee: *PP*, Royal Commission on Alien Immigration, Vols. 1-4,

As demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 4, during the nineteenth century and for the early decades of the period, St. Bartholomew Italians worked as organ-grinders. As a result they experienced hostility and intimidation. This occupation was considered tantamount to scrounging and therefore had a low status.[20] Mrs. B explained how her mother had been spat at when she tried to collect money from an audience outside a country pub during the late nineteenth century,[21] and at approximately the same time, the grandfather of another respondent was refused payment after he had been asked to entertain a group of children at a birthday party held at a house in Edgbaston.[22] It is also apparent that when barrel-organs were hired out to non-Italians, as they were from at least the 1920s, they were sometimes deliberately damaged or stolen.[23] The occupation of organ-grinding fulfilled the widespread image of immigrants as beggars, and upheld the view that they lowered the tone of city streets.

Organ-grinding was not the only street occupation common among Italians. Ice-cream selling was another major type of employment and one which they came to monopolise. Robin Palmer has suggested that because Italians carved a "niche" for themselves within the food and catering trades as ice-cream workers, they were rarely considered a threat to native workers. To an extent this was true, but evidence from the St. Bartholomew Italians suggests their presence evoked animosity on the streets, and the abuse they received whilst working in this occupation was widely experienced:[24]

1903-4, pp 259-61 and 755.

[20]During World War One the *B'ham Daily Mail* questioned the apparent reduction in the number of Italian organ-grinders in England in a brief article that was positioned adjacent to one which commented on the "Disappearance of Street Beggars" providing a clear link between the two occupations: *B'ham Daily Mail*, 5.2.16.

[21]EBF2020.

[22]JGM3027.

[23]See "Alleged theft of a street organ", told how a barrel-organ which went missing for a few days was returned to E. DeFelice, 7 Duddeston Row, in a damaged condition: *B'ham Daily Post*. 3.2.22.

[24]At the end of the nineteenth century street gangs in Britain would often target and assault Italian ice-cream vendors: G. Pearson, *Hooligan. A History of Respectable*

> "...them as used to go out with the ice-cream and the 'taters (baked potatoes), used to always be shouted at. Our mom used to say they used to shout after her, "ice-creamio"."[25]

This respondent did not believe the taunts her mother received, which occurred around the end of World War One, would have upset her much, and thought that she would probably have shouted back. Narratives suggest that Italian ice-cream vendors had to be resilient to make this their living. Mr. Z spoke about the treatment his brother had received as an ice-cream vendor in a Birmingham suburb during the 1920s.

> "We went to somewhere ... it was a rough quarter. Somebody threw a rat in the ice-cream. There was a crowd and there was always a big clique, y'know, stupid. That's all I say, low mentality. He couldn't do nothing about it, ... I mean our Joseph,he was independent, selling ice-cream, y'see, he'd gotta make a certain amount of money."[26]

Although the first and second generations of St. Bartholomew Italians coped with harassment the third generation were not prepared to tolerate such treatment and they became reluctant to sell ice-cream on the streets. This was confirmed in 1937, in an interview with St. Bartholomew Italian, Vincent Pontone, who is reported to have complained that, "[D]a younger generation. Dey ... will no push da barrow on Saturday and Sunday. It is sad!"[27] The reason for the change of attitude towards ice-cream selling on the streets was explained by Mr. V who was born in 1913, and witnessed the shift:

> "... they weren't very keen because, as I've tried to tell you, there was a lot of racism about y'know, and they wanted to get away from it. While they was out there selling ice-cream, then they'd never get away from it."[28]

Fears, Macmillan, 1991, p 76.
[25]MDF3012.
[26]HZM2005.
[27]*B'ham Despatch*, 10.11.33.
[28]FVM3002.

The unwillingness of the younger generations to be associated with the ice-cream trade was their attempt to break the stereotypical image of Italians. Obtaining work in non-Italian owned businesses was another way of escaping their poor image, but this was not always easy. When the second and third generations of St. Bartholomew Italians sought work outside the Quarter, during the late 1920s and 1930s, it was a period of relatively high unemployment in Birmingham. Chapter 4 revealed how the St. Bartholomew Italians often depended on the recommendations of friends and family to obtain employment outside the Quarter. This method of recruitment eliminated the inevitable questions St. Bartholomew Italians were asked about their nationality.

> "I used to go round lookin' for jobs and when they knew what my name was, y'know they'd say, "Well you're not English are you?" I'd say "No, I'm Italian." I never used to get the work. I wouldn't say that was on the large scale, but ... a foreigner was foreigner."[29]

This respondent eventually became a terrazzo worker.

Not all St. Bartholomew Italians experienced work related discrimination; indeed, some respondents worked for local non-Italians, but this was usually temporary, perhaps labouring for the Bull Ring hawkers.[30] Relations between the immediate local indigenous population and the St. Bartholomew Italians were good. One respondent claimed the Bull Ring workers, "had hearts of gold", and he explained their reaction the first time an ice-cream vendor from the company Midlands' Counties tried to sell in the Quarter.

---

[29]RFM2024.
[30]JGM3027.

> "Midland Counties was one of the bigger (ice-cream) firms set up ... and they put trikes on the road. They was gonna swamp the country with em ... This was just before the war, (World War Two). The first one that come down our street, they (Bull Ring hawkers) threw him out!"[31]

For several subsequent years during the early 1920s the number of unemployed men was high in Birmingham[32] and employment continued to be difficult to find during the 1930s. During these two decades antipathy for the St. Bartholomew Italians was felt by locals concerning their fears about being displaced by foreign workers. This was a national problem which the government tried to alleviate by introducing more stringent restrictions on the entry of foreign labour into Britain. As employment became more difficult to obtain during the early 1920s, feelings of resentment became evident, and jobs which St. Bartholomew Italians had held previously, and apparently without animosity, became the subject of controversy. In 1922 an unemployed building worker complained to the *Birmingham Daily Mail* about not being able to obtain work on Birmingham's War Memorial Hall. Contained within his criticism of the organisation of labour on the site, "Ex-soldier Starving" objected to the employment of St. Bartholomew Italian demolition contractors, whom he referred to as "foreigners taken on in preference to those who fought and helped to pay for the said Memorial".[33]

The effects of unemployment were also felt among shop-keepers and food manufacturers and as a result consumers were urged to buy British goods.[34] During

---

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] In 1921 the recorded number of unemployed rose from 55,000 in February and peaked at 80,023 in July. During 1922 similar numbers were unemployed, and nearly 3,000 were on short-time. By 1923 the number of recorded unemployed dropped to 53,000 in June. See *B'ham Daily Post* reports.

[33] This St. Bartholomew Italian who had previously and deliberately Anglicised his name from "Martini" to "Martin", explained to the reader that he had lived in the city for 35 years, had served in the British forces during the Boer War, and had a son killed in World War One fighting for Britain: *B'ham Daily Mail*, 18.7.22.

[34] A newspaper article also urged people to buy British, "especially housewives": *B'ham Mail*, 17.4.29.

the 1930s slump, the grocery trade journal *The Modern Trader* increasingly publicised the need for its members to stock British made foods. In March,1931 the St. Bartholomew Italian ice-cream wafer entrepreneur, Enrico Facchino, used the journal to promote his company and its manufacture of ice-cream wafers in an advertisement which read, "Cream Wafers. A new and better (British) product at less than Continental prices."[35] His company also featured as one of a small number which were "[H]ighly recommended firms of manufacture, wholesalers, Agents etc., supplying goods to Grocery and Allied Trades (sic)."[36] However, although Facchino advertised in the May edition of the journal his claim of being British did not appear in his advertisements, and by the end of 1932 advertisements for his products ceased in this journal. Furthermore, he no longer appeared in the recommended list of reputable grocery suppliers which were featured in the journal from 1930. It is unclear why these advertisements stopped appearing, but other articles and advertisements frequently appeared urging retailers to buy from British and Empire owned companies and emphasised the importance of grocers showing their patriotism.[37]

In common with other immigrant groups, Italians were stereotyped with the dual image of, on the one hand being lazy and scroungers on the parish, and on the other, being hard workers who exploited their employees. Some people believed that Italians worked so hard that marriage between Italian men and English women would prove too much for the women to cope with. Mr. Z's English fiancee was warned by her parents,

---

[35] *The Modern Trader*, March, 1931. E. Facchino was born in Italy and came to B'ham in the late 1890s: *Aliens Registers.*
[36] *The Modern Trader*, Feb.1931- Dec.1931.
[37] Advertisements often carried patriotic logos, for example, "Use England's Glory Matches and Employ British Labour": *The Modern Trader*, Oct, 1930 and Jan, Feb, 1932. In 1931 this journal included an article about the need for retailers to buy British and Empire produced goods: *The Modern Trader*, March, 1931, p57.

> "it's a little trap ... you're getting married into a family. That's it y'know. And her father turned round and he said, "Yes, and you'll have to pull your weight an' all because them Italians, they don't half work y'know. You wunt sleep, you'll get no sleep."[38]

Immigrants living in Britain found themselves in a double bind. For, if they established their own businesses they were considered opportunists who were stealing British resources, and if they were employed by British companies, they were accused of displacing the native labour force.

Poverty

Chapter three discussed the St. Bartholomew area of the city in relation to the large extent of poverty and high rates of mortality and morbidity there. Aware of this poverty a number of charities operated in the area under the leadership of the church and middle-class philanthropists. One of these was John Pentland who, from at least 1893, headed the Pentland's 'Street Robins' Charity.[39] This charity organised annual events at which food, and clothing were distributed, and entertainment was provided for the children who lived in and around the wards of St. Mary's and St. Bartholomew's. Some of these children were pupils from St. Michael's RC School, which the majority of St. Bartholomew Italian children attended. [40]

Early in the twentieth century an annual report of Pentland's Charity included a description of the children who attended a summer outing in which it stated, "[A]nother characteristic of the motley crowd, which struck the beholder was its cosmopolitanism. Beside those who men would presumably designate Christians, "Jews, Turks, infidels and heretics," ... all seemed to have their representatives. There

---

[38]HZM2005.
[39]John Pentland, Vice-Chairman of B'ham School Board, was the head of this organisation which was also known as the B'ham Street Mission. Its primary aim was to "conquer ... drink, dirt and the devil" and to provide help for 'street' children, who became known as "Pentland's Robins". These were children who worked and spent a large proportion of their time on the streets of B'ham: *Pentland's Street Robins Annual Report, 1900-1*, p 4.
[40] *Pentland's Street Robins*, p 9.

were children from the Italian Quarter and even the swarthy nigger boy, with his crisp locks".[41] A similar event held two years later, in 1904, was attended by two *Birmingham Daily Mail* journalists who wrote a very long article, entitled "Waifs at Breakfast". In their report the "5,000" children who attended the event were described as generally having, "scarcely a rag on their backs".[42] In language which was extremely patronising and linked immigrants firmly with poverty and its attendant notions of depravity and burdens to rate payers St. Bartholomew Italian children were singled out for particular attention. Yet curiously, although this report focused on debasing images, it also portrayed Italians as innocuous characters. Presenting images of immigrants which are both negative and positive are not uncommon, and C. Holmes argues that ambivalent attitudes about a single ethnic group can be held simultaneously.[43] In this example the journalists quite clearly had mixed feelings: they felt compassion for these children, and yet they were compelled to remind the reader that they were the offspring of immigrants who were potential threats to society as destitute immigrants.

The 1901 census report firmly denied the widespread rumour that immigrants were a large burden on the rates, as either criminals or inmates of workhouses or asylums.[44] During the years 1904 and 1905 and until the Aliens Act was passed, an extremely large number of articles appeared in Birmingham's newspapers relating to the on going parliamentary debates and the opinion that poor immigrants had harmful effects in Britain. Irrespective of their country of origin all poor immigrants were considered a potential drain on the local rates. Even following the Aliens Act in 1905, when the numbers of 'destitute' immigrants entering Britain were regulated, accusations against immigrants and their perceived burden on the local rates continued to be a major concern.

---

41 *Pentland's Street Robins Annual Report, 1902-3*, p 2.
42 *B'ham Daily Mail*, 11.1.04.
43 C. Holmes, *A Tolerant Country? Immigrants, Refugees and Minorities in Britain*, Faber and Faber, 1991, p 92.
44 *Census*, 1901, General Index, 412, pp 140-1.

Earlier chapters have revealed the poor financial circumstances of St. Bartholomew Italians when they arrived in Birmingham, and how many families experienced poverty. Although the extent and levels of poverty within the Italian Quarter varied and cannot be defined exactly, oral evidence suggests that a large proportion of St. Bartholomew Italians were better off by the 1930s than the first generation had been on their arrival in Birmingham in the 1890s. Despite this the stigma attached to being 'destitute' immigrants was evident on numerous occasions. Reminders of their humble beginnings appeared in the local press in articles which contrived to point out that "poor Italians" lived in the city.[45]

Evidence that the working class connected poverty with degradation was provided in the last chapter, and this was confirmed by Mrs. E who, during the late 1920s, won a scholarship to St. Paul's Grammar School which was located a few miles away from the Quarter. She was shocked to learn about the reputation of the St. Bartholomew's area as a slum district:

> "What got me, when I first went to St. Paul's, the girls who were supposed to be better off than us, (said) "Oh, you come from the slums, don't you?" Now I'd never 'eard the word slums 'til I got there and neither had my friends."[46]

Some people from outside the Quarter believed it was the fault of the inhabitants that the area in which they lived was a slum. Mrs. B confirmed that to people from outside, the Quarter "... was a ghetto y'know".[47] However, as Carl Chinn has pointed out, "these places were not dens of iniquity. Nor were those poor areas which had infamous reputations".[48] Yet the poor, regardless of individual circumstances,

---

[45] *B'ham Daily Post*, 14.08.02; *B'ham Daily Post*, 12.01.03; *B'ham Daily Post* 11.01.04; *B'ham Daily Post*, 17.08.05; *B'ham Daily Mail*, 16.9.16; *B'ham Despatch*, 10.11.33.
[46] BEF3011.
[47] EBF2001.
[48] C. Chinn, *Poverty Amidst Prosperity: The Urban Poor in England, 1834-1914*, Manchester U.P, 1995, pp 136-7.

were grouped together and the image formed that they were the most undesirable elements of society who would inevitably and willingly become burdens to rate payers.

During the 1930s the St. Bartholomew ward was cleared so that the slums there could be demolished. Shortly before the Italian population were disbanded a reporter from the *Birmingham Despatch* reviewed the area. He reminded the public about how "impoverished" Italians had "flocked" to England and that some had settled in Birmingham.[49] Numerous reports at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries strongly suggested that all poor immigrants came to Britain to claim parish relief and to take advantage of the local medical facilities.[50] Yet respondents' evidence is equally as persuasive and suggests that even though St. Bartholomew Italians experienced unemployment, they rarely went to the authorities for financial help, and that the workhouse held as much horror for immigrants as it did to the indigenous poor. In 1936 Mrs. B's mother asked for help:

> "[T]here was no way my father could get work, he was too ill to work. When we applied to the social services, it was called the Parish the, they wouldn't give my mother any money. Get rid of the ... piano, they said. Well, I used to play the piano. She couldn't do a thing, she couldn't get a penny."[51]

Mrs B's father suffered from tuberculosis for a number of years prior to asking for help from the authorities. The house in which they lived was owned by another Italian who had reduced the rent in the hope it would help her family in the short term. It was not until her father died that financial help was received from the local authorities and her mother "got thirty-bob a week," which was reduced as soon as Mrs. B started work. Claiming relief was a very last resort amongst unemployed St. Bartholomew Italians who, it seems, would try to help each other by providing employment, or else they

---

[49] *B'ham Despatch*, 10.11.33.

[50] The Royal Commission on the Poor Law and the Relief of Distress, 1905-9 made no mention of immigrants being chief claimants. Cited by Jones, *Immigration and Social Policy*, p 89.

[51] EBF2001. Only one other respondent said his father claimed parish relief: NPM3009.

would temporarily diversify. Mrs. B's father mended shoes for neighbours, Mr. G's father converted his ice-cream cart into a wet fish stall when a hard winter prevented the sale of ice-cream[52] and, in the 1920s, when Mr. V's parents realised their family was too large to be supported on the income from their corner shop, Mr. V became a runner for a bookie.[53]

Hygiene

During the second reading of the Aliens Bill, in 1898, the Earl of Dudley repeated many of the Marquis of Salisbury's earlier predictions about the believed harmful influences of immigrants in the country, and added that their presence would inevitably lead to, "a lowering of the whole moral and social standard of the population of those districts in which they settle", because of their tendency to live in overcrowded and insanitary conditions.[54]

A common belief held by many of the better-off was that an inevitable consequence of poverty was exploitation and degradation. Evidence of how this image manifested itself in relation to the St. Bartholomew Italians was demonstrated in the last chapter. Respondents subconsciously linked together notions of poverty with being dirty, and gave repeated assurances that in the Quarter, mothers worked hard to keep homes and clothing clean. For many people the concept of poverty included images of disease, insanitary living conditions and over-crowding, and these were among the earliest representations of immigrants presented in the nineteenth century. Immigrants were cited as the cause of slum housing conditions, even though more often areas similar to the St. Bartholomew's ward where immigrants lived, suffered high rates of mortality and morbidity prior to them living there. Once again the press were instrumental in spreading these myths, and the belief that all poor immigrants presented a threat to hygiene in Britain.

---

[52]JGM3027.
[53]FVM3002.
[54]*PP*, The Aliens Bill, 4th series, Vol. 58, 23.5.98.

During the early 1890s, at around the time that enquiries were taking place into the effects of immigration in Britain, four youths were arrested for breaking and entering the premises of a St. Bartholomew Italian and stealing ice-cream. Despite the fact that the youths were caught eating the ice-cream by a policemen they pleaded not guilty, and in his defence one of the youths stated, "I would not eat his ice cream, nor anybody else if they seen how it was made." The reaction of the court on hearing this was amusement. Even so, three of the youths were sentenced to seven days' hard labour.[55] As previously discussed, the area of St. Bartholomew's was renowned as a slum and insanitary area of the city, where many of the poorest people lived, and the image presented by these youths so easily reinforced the general stereotype of immigrants.

The local press regularly printed articles warning the public about the potential dangers of immigrants during the first two decades of the twentieth century, not only creating the impression that immigrants caused, spread and perpetuated disease and filth, but that they took advantage of medical facilities paid for by, and intended for the British.[56] It is unlikely that the press were unaware of either their potential to influence the public, or what the outcome of presenting such inflammatory opinions could be. For almost a century the press in Britain have realised their role in forming public opinion. A. G. Gardiner, editor of the *Daily News* stated in 1914, "it is easier (for a journalist) to appeal to the lowest passions of men than to their better instincts".[57]

---

[55] *B'ham Daily Gazette*, 7.10.90.

[56] In an article entitled, "Tramps and Aliens" the public were warned about the perceived dangers caused by immigrants coming to Britain with eye diseases. The disease was said to be highly contagious and it was claimed that almost two-thirds of the patients who were treated at Ophthalmic London Hospital were, "undesirable guests, (who) on landing rush to our hospitals, which are supported by the voluntary contributions of all classes for the benefit of their suffering countrymen and elbow out those for whom such welfare institutions have been established": *B'ham Post*, 10.1.05.

[57] Engel, *Tickle the Public*, p 81.

Links between poverty, ill-health and immigrants were emphasised by the press and politicians. In 1898 the member of parliament for Wigton, Sir H. Maxwell, brought to the attention of his colleagues the potential danger to the public of the sale of ice-cream on the streets. After exaggerating the effects of ice-cream, which he claimed was responsible for two deaths, he attempted to further incite the disapproval of the MP's with the question, "[I]s the right honourable Gentleman aware that these articles (ice-creams) are made and purveyed by aliens?"[58]

Concerns circulated in Britain from the last quarter of the nineteenth century about the conditions in which ice-cream was made and the possibility that bacteria were transmitted in ice-cream containers, (licking-glasses) in which it was served.[59] In the summer of 1905, in Birmingham, fifty-two people were reported to have suffered food poisoning and the incident received publicity for almost a week, during which speculation grew about its causes. As the investigation proceeded a newspaper stated that contaminated ice-cream was probably the cause of the outbreak, although it also admitted that such illness could have been "attributed to eating bad fruit or fish, or a hundred other things".[60] Perhaps unsurprisingly, in view of the widespread adverse publicity that immigrants were diseased and dirty, the report added, "the sufferers themselves say it was ... ice-cream".[61] The cause of the outbreak was eventually traced to ice-cream manufactured by Antonio Frezza. On the same day, Frezza prepared fifteen barrows of ice-cream using the same ingredients and utensils, but only the one barrow was infected. In the conclusion of the enquiry conducted by Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Robertson, he stated that the conditions in which the

---

[58]Sir Maxwell's sensationalist account of the food poisoning incident was corrected by the President of the Local Government Board, Mr. H. Chaplin: *PP*, Sale of Ice Creams in the Streets, 4th series, Vol.59, p 1223/4.
[59]Sponza, *Realities and Images*, p 228.
[60]*B'ham Daily Post*, 17.7.05.
[61]The newspaper report also stated that at least two of those who were reported to have been poisoned, eventually admitted to their being other potential contributory factors, such as mixing the ice-cream with a tin of salmon, and a child who had been drinking beer. *Ibid.*

contaminated ice-cream had been produced were, "not worse than that of many other premises where ice-cream and other foods are stored or manufactured in Birmingham".[62] Robertson clearly pointed out that similar incidents of food poisoning were likely in the future because hygiene standards were low in many of places where food was prepared for sale. The editor of the *Birmingham Daily Post* supported this view, and allowed the publication of a letter of apology from Frezza, in which he pointed out that this was the first complaint brought against him.[63]

The outcry against immigrants and their risks to health continued. In 1911 the Amended Aliens Bill was read and once again the press focused on the debate, and took opportunities to print examples of how immigrants were a threat to society. *The Birmingham Gazette and Express* printed a statement of the proposed amendments to the Act, one of which was that sanitary conditions must be maintained by "aliens".[64] Almost simultaneously a report appeared in Birmingham's press produced by Mr. H.L. Eason, Senior Ophthalmic Surgeon to Guy's Hospital, which emphasised the harmful affects of "aliens" and blaming them entirely for the spread of eye-disease in Britain.[65]

However, not all of the medical profession shared the beliefs that immigrants lived deliberately in insanitary conditions, or that their circumstances would not be improved if they were given some help. Dr. Robertson commented on the compliance of St. Bartholomew Italians in relation to the production of ice-cream and hygiene regulations which were introduced after the outbreak of food poisoning in 1905.[66] He recognised that Italians had made "considerable alterations" to their properties and in methods of making ice-cream. Dr. Robertson concluded, "[T]he work is being continued during 1912, and the Italians are falling into line well." Miss F.E. Wright, Assistant Superintendent of the Lady Health Visitors for St. Bartholomew's, also

---

62 *B'ham Daily Post*, 26.7.05.
63 *B'ham Daily Post*, 28.7.05.
64 *The B'ham Gazette and Express*, "The Undesirable Alien", 22.3.11.
65 "The Responsibility of aliens for Eye Disease", *B'ham Daily Post*, 10.4.11.
66 Only one prosecution had been necessary to enforce the new regulations: *MOH Report*, 1911.

confirmed the view that people who lived there wanted to improve their circumstances and that if they were given help this would happen. Miss Wright was a health visitor in the area for over ten years and held the belief that a gradual improvement had occurred in the area during that time. She stated that poverty was the major cause of health problems, but added people were willing take advice, and they "receive us so nicely".[67]

Crime

Included within the numerous perceptions generally held about immigrants was the belief that among them was a large number of criminals and anarchists.[68] An important and influential promoter of these notions was the Marquis of Salisbury who from the end of the nineteenth century made attempts to introduce an Aliens Act. This campaign was reported in local newspapers in tandem with adverse publicity about the Italian Quarter.

One of the earliest introductions the Birmingham public had to the emerging Italian Quarter was a report which appeared in 1893 in a local newspaper about criminality among the St. Bartholomew Italians, and in particular their subversive potentiality. The article related the details of an assault between four St. Bartholomew Italian organ-grinders who worked for two padroni. It was reported that for some

---

[67]After the sinking of the Lusitania, for example, attacks were made on Germans, Chinese and Russian Jews: Cesarani, "An Alien Concept?" p 36.

[68]During 1894, the year in which Lord Salisbury introduced the Aliens Bill there were a number of reported incidents of anarchy on the Continent, primarily in Italy, but also in France and Spain. During July of that year, numerous accounts of attempted coups taking place in Europe appeared in local papers. For the public in B'ham the topic of anarchy was not just something that happened overseas, since in 1892, at the not too distant town of Walsall, anarchists had been discovered within the immigrant population living there. Lord Salisbury, who was convinced attempted anarchy in Britain was imminent relayed news of the political disruption in Europe to the country in a speech which was also printed in the *B'ham Daily Gazette*, which warned that Britain should take steps to safeguard itself, and be particularly cautious about allowing European immigrants into the country. See *B'ham Daily Gazette*: 2-10.7.94. Between 1892 and 1897 numerous reports of anarchy occurring on the Continent appeared in the B'ham press.

time the use of a particular street 'pitch' by two of these street musicians had created intense animosity, which culminated in one of them being stabbed in the lip.[69] Incidents of stabbings and violence involving people from the St. Bartholomew's area were not uncommon at that time, although this was not revealed in the article. Therefore, the newspaper report provided additional evidence for those who believed that criminality existed among immigrants, but more importantly it emphasised the cultural differences that existed between Italians and the English. The article, "How our street music is provided" emphasised the fact that Italians used their own methods of social control to police their community, which did not conform to the British system of law and order. This article did not include any comments from the newspaper about the court case, but its timing was such that it had the potential to influence public opinion, for it appeared at the time when immigration was being debated and immigrants were being branded as dangerous and a threat to British society.[70]

Following the findings of the Royal Commission into Alien Immigration in 1904 a summary of the reactions of parliament appeared in the *Birmingham Daily Post*, which stated that legislation to restrict immigration was necessary because, "the law as it stands today, has proved powerless to prevent the influx of the alien scum of Europe."[71] During 1904 the newspaper printed articles from all over Britain about immigrants involved in various petty acts of crime. These reports presented some of the worst images of immigrants and conjoined with the anti-immigrant opinions being expressed in parliament as the Aliens Bill was being debated. However, an important distinction exists between parliament and the press. In parliament a mixture of opinions were presented and listened to, as speakers voiced views both for and against immigration and immigrants. Some MPs pointed out that not all immigrants were

---

[69] *B'ham Daily Gazette*, 3.2.93.
[70] An average of one article each month appeared in *The Times* newspaper between 1890 and 1894.
[71] *B'ham Daily Post*, 26.4.04, p 6.

intrinsically untrustworthy or harmful to Britain. Despite this newspapers contained very few reports which presented a positive image of immigrants.[72] The majority of articles had titles intended to catch the eye of the reader, such as "Another Alien Criminal", thus emphasising the perception that immigrants were a threat to law and order.[73] During the months which lead to the passing of the Aliens Act in 1905 even the most ordinary of topics were turned into diatribes about immigrants and their harmful effects on society.[74] Among twenty-five cases heard in the Children's Court in Birmingham in the spring of 1905 was one involving an Italian boy and his father who were accused with obstructing the pavement with an ice-cream cart. Only the case which was brought against the Italians was described in detail in the press.[75]

Without any doubt the attention which was focused on immigrants during 1905 by the Birmingham press was immense and mostly adverse in content and tone. When

---

[72]Local newspapers printed very few articles which presented immigrants in a positive light but for examples see *B'ham Daily Mail:* 2.6.15; 5.2.16; 27.9.27; 10.10.34; *The B'ham Post*:13.01.28.

[73]This report was about a German jewel thief in London who was sentenced to nine months hard labour. When passing his verdict the judge commented, "[W]e have quite enough criminals and crime of our own without importing others": *B'ham Daily Post*, 13.10.04. Other examples, "Russian Jew in Trouble", was an article about a street hawker who did not have a license: *B'ham Daily Post*, 11.8.04; "An Irish Labourer Fined": *B'ham Daily Post*, 5.7.04. "Raids on Foreign Clubs," was about an Italian in London who was fined for selling alcohol without a license: *B'ham Daily Post*, 18.10.04. See also, *B'ham Daily Post*, 20.10.04; 27.10.04; 1.4.04; 6.4.04; 13.4.04; and 16.4.04. It is particularly noticeable in the *B'ham Post* that during 1904 and 1905 there were also a number of short articles about "gypsies" living in and around B'ham, who the authorities continually attempted to move on. See for example, 8.10.04; 1.4.05; 27.7.05; 29.7.05; 17.8.05.

[74]In a newspaper article about motoring and car care, which appeared in the adjoining column to one about the Medical Officer of Health's report on Italian ice-cream, a journalist warned motorists about immigrant drivers, who he claimed, "are not in many cases in sympathy with the spirit of English folk with regard to conduct on the road; when prejudice and antipathy arise - as they frequently do arise - it does not soften the situation if the resulting language is a little mixed in style and inflection": *B'ham Daily Post*, 18.7.05.

[75]This summons to appear in Court was reminiscent of attitudes that were held by the watch committee and members of the lower middle-class during the nineteenth century when the police in Birmingham had been pressured to clear the streets of traders who threatened the livelihood of fixed traders in the city.

the Aliens Act was eventually passed, the public had been persistently reminded of the worst excesses of immigrants in Britain for almost twenty years, and as V. Bevan points out, "[I]n much of the public mind the die was already cast against the alien".[76] In a comparatively small sample of one Birmingham newspaper examined in 1905, twenty-two individual reports were identified concerning criminal and other inconsequential activities of immigrants in the country, and a further ten related to the debate on the Aliens Bill.[77]

Reports appeared in local newspapers about Italians more than any other immigrant group who lived in Birmingham, and most of these articles emphasised the criminal element of the Quarter.[78] Italians had a reputation for violence and, in particular, using knives.[79] This image of St. Bartholomew Italians was one of the most potent and probably began in the 1890s with the stabbing incident cited earlier in this chapter. The rumours of violence among the St. Bartholomew Italians were last reported in the late 1930s in a newspaper report entitled, " "Little Italy" and knife rule are gone". This article reviewed the history of the Quarter and reminded readers of the period before World War One "when bottle fights, brawls and knifings" were said to have occurred with such regularity that a magistrate is supposed to have threatened wholesale deportation of the St. Bartholomew Italian community.[80]

Before the settlement of St. Bartholomew Italians the area in which the Italian Quarter was formed had a violent reputation. Respondents pointed out that the

---

[76]V.Bevan, *The Development of British Immigration Law*, Croom Helm, 1986, p 72.
[77]The sample of newspapers for 1905 was one week in each month of the year.
[78]For example, "Italians in Trouble", 12.5.05; "Affray in the Italian Quarter", 19.9.05; "Organ Grinder's Pitch", 29.12.05; "Italians at Variance", 30.6.15, all appeared in the *B'ham Daily Post*. "Deportation of Italians": *B'ham Daily Mail*, 22.8.17, 28.8.17 and 31.8.17.
[79]Reports from elsewhere in Britain may have helped to perpetuate this stereotyping of Italians. A respondent interviewed during the Royal Commission into Alien Immigration in 1905 gave a lengthy deposition about the tendency of Italians to fight with knives in London and an article about the London Italian community also gave evidence about Italian knife fighters: *The Strand Magazine*, 1905. (I would like to thank Doreen Hopwood for bringing this article to my attention).
[80]*B'ham Sunday Despatch*, 10.4.38.

neighbourhood comprised a large number of lodging houses which were inhabited by English and other nationals, to whom police were frequently called to intervene in fights. Until 1905 a large number of public houses were located in the area which were considered such a nuisance that a number of licences were refused by the authorities.[81] The reduction in the number of public houses does not appear to have had much effect, for in 1912 the local Roman Catholic church acknowledged the bad reputation of the area.[82]

Local newspapers regularly emphasised the violent and criminal aspect of immigrants and included St. Bartholomew Italians in their portrayals. An article concerning the court appearance of Italian and English youths who had been fighting appeared in the *Birmingham Daily Post* in 1904, and seems to have been included to serve as a reminder of the threat of immigrants within society. The magistrate summed up the case as merely a "public house brawl", and two of the men were ordered to pay fines.[83] However, this type of fight was unremarkable and of little significance, but was probably reported because it served as a reminder of one unruly St. Bartholomew Italian.

In reality crime amongst the St. Bartholomew Italians was fairly rare. An examination of the Registers for Birmingham's Victoria Law Courts two and three, for the period 1907 to the end of 1912, indicates that St. Bartholomew Italians were involved in less than .03% of the cases heard.[84] Of those 136 court hearings which involved St. Bartholomew Italians, the vast majority were for petty crimes such as gambling, making a noise in the street and being drunk and disorderly. A further 23% cases of these involved assault and 15% were prosecutions for creating obstructions in

---

[81] *B'ham Daily Post*, 10.5.05.
[82] *B'ham Catholic Magazine*, Dec, 1912, p 506.
[83] *B'ham Daily Post*, 13.4.11.
[84] An estimate suggests that in 1916 the St. Bartholomew Italian population was approximately 210 (this figure includes only those who were born in Italy and aged 18 and over in 1916). In 1912 the total population of B'ham was 840,202. Therefore St. Bartholomew Italians comprised slightly more than .00025% of the total B'ham population. Adapted from the *Aliens Registers* and *MOH Report, 1912* .

the street with ice-cream carts or barrel-organs.[85] An explanation for the statement made by the press in the 1930s about criminality in the Quarter is that the number of court cases brought against them rapidly increased during the first decade of the twentieth century. Between 1907 and 1912 hearings involving at least one Italian more than doubled in comparison with the period 1899 to 1902.

The local press were not unique in their attitude towards immigrants and St. Bartholomew Italians, and although it is impossible to state with certainty the extent to which they influenced public opinion, there is evidence that some among the working class shared similar views. In 1915 a local newspaper described the Italian Quarter as having a "mean aspect"[86] and the experiences of St. Bartholomew Italians indicate this view was not uncommon. The belief held amongst some of the working class that the Quarter was a dangerous area for strangers was evident from at least the early 1920s. Mrs. L's family were Italians who lived a short distance away from the Quarter and when she asked her English friends to accompany her on shopping trips there,

> "they used to say. "Oh I'm not going down there, they fight with knives."[87]

Interviews with people who had once lived close by the Quarter also confirmed that St. Bartholomew Italians were feared. As a child Arthur Evans lived with his family in Digbeth close to the Quarter. In an interview about the area he claimed that he "might" have been stabbed in the leg by an Italian. His evidence seemed to be influenced by rumour rather than fact, and based around the perception that Italians were violent. He explained his feelings about the Quarter.

---

[85]Petty Sessions Registers, Victoria Law Courts, Courts 2 and 3, 23.10.1907-7.12.1912.
[86]*B'ham Daily Post*, 3.6.15.
[87]MLF2014.

"Well it was rather similar to the ghetto system, you know, that was their Quarter. In fact, I think that was the cause of the trouble. 'Cos if you went up there you were on their patch."[88]

The fact that Italians had their 'own patch' could have created resentment among the indigenous population as a result of the acute housing shortage in Birmingham during the first half of the twentieth century. Chapter 4 showed that St. Bartholomew Italians were indeed territorial. 'Protecting' their area was as important among the youths of the Quarter as much as it was among youths living in numerous working-class districts in Britain at that time. G. Pearson has pointed out that street gangs were common, and that they practised "holding the street", against strangers.[89] Furthermore, the St. Bartholomew Italians were not averse to protecting themselves or their image physically, which may have been interpreted as a provocation by some people who lived outside the ward. Mrs. L recalled an incident which occurred around 1924, when a drunken Englishman was heard shouting in one of the streets in the Quarter one Saturday afternoon, challenging "any Italian" to come out and fight him, but the man left when her sister went out into the street and threatened to hit him with her shoe.[90]

Showing such animosity towards the St. Bartholomew Italians was not uncommon. During the mid-1930s, Mrs. D described how the dangerous reputation of the area had inhibited her love-life.

> "You'd got a fella like, and they'd bring ya 'ome. Tek you to the top of Albert Street. They'd ony gotta know you lived in the 'Talian quarter, "We're not gonna come any farther with ya, we dun want a knife in our backs!"[91]

---

[88] *The Digbeth and Deritend Project*, MS1497, B'ham Reference Library.
[89] Pearson, *Hooligans*, p 84.
[90] GLF2003.
[91] MDF3012.

However, not everyone shared these beliefs. Another respondent who was interviewed for the *Digbeth and Deritend Project* claimed to have known the Quarter quite well and he disputed the reputation it had.

> "Some used to think it was frightening to go round (the Quarter), but it wasn't. They (the Italians) all mixed, and it was alright."[92]

Most of the people in the immediate area were amenable to the St. Bartholomew Italians as indicated in the above example and that cited in Chapter 5, when Bull Ring hawkers reacted against ice-cream vendors from commercial companies entering the Quarter. However, working-class residents in other suburbs were not as tolerant, as was demonstrated in the incident when a rat was thrown into the ice-cream cart.

Some English parents were apprehensive about Italians and reacted with hostility towards their children marrying them. Many respondents who had an English spouse, or whose parents or grandparents had married non-endogamously described the opposition of English parents towards their children's choice of partner. In 1912, Mr. V's English grandparents refused permission for their daughter to marry her Italian boyfriend:

> "There was quite a row. In the finish it got that bad that before she got married she left home. It was eventually patched up before the wedding, she went back home. I don't know how long she was away, but she lodged in Bordesley Street."[93]

For some, in similar circumstances, this resulted in loss of contact between parents and their adult children once they were married, and for others the consequences were that there were few visits between in-laws and limited access to grandchildren. Mr.A's in-laws tried to prevent their daughter marrying him in 1934 specifically because he was Italian.

---

[92] *The Digbeth and Deritend Project*, MS1497, B'ham Reference Library.
[93] FVM3002.

"Oh, they ignored me, y'know. I couldn't go and visit her in her own house... she used to come to my house in Bartholomew Street, but I couldn't visit her, y'know."[94]

The animosity continued for a further ten years after the couple were married. J.K. Puar claims that inter-racial marriages, "have symbolised a final assimilation into white society".[95] Yet in the case of the St. Bartholomew Italian population this was untrue. Even though the majority of marriages after 1920 were non-endogamous the St. Bartholomew Italians were not accepted by society. C. Holmes has identified the range and fluidity of attitudes held about immigrants in Britain. He suggests that immigrants can be accepted on an impersonal level, but often these same people are not allowed intimacy, say as relatives or people who would be taken home to meet the family.[96]

During the 1920s and 1930s fewer articles about immigrants in general, and the St. Bartholomew Italians in particular, appeared in the local press. When reports did occur they were less concerned about promoting the St. Bartholomew Italian population as 'undesirables' than earlier in the century. However, whilst the lack of evidence in newspapers makes it appear St. Bartholomew Italians received less hostility during this period, there is evidence to suggest they continued to be regarded as 'different'. Their language, style of dress and types of work provoked comment from the early years of their settlement in the Quarter and it is evident that the cultural differences between the English and the St. Bartholomew Italians fascinated the local press. In the late 1920s, during the period of fascist activity in Birmingham, the press concentrated less on negative aspects of the Quarter and emphasised the traditions and cultural pursuits among the St. Bartholomew Italians.[97] Of the relatively few reports which appeared during the 1920s and 1930s most stressed language, dress and religion

---

[94]CAM3010.
[95]Puar, "Revisiting Discources of "Whiteness" and "Asianness", p 141.
[96]Holmes, *A Tolerant Country?* p 91.
[97]*B'ham Daily Mail,* 6.1.27; 17.9.27 and 1.10.27.

in relation to the St. Bartholomew Italians. Unlike many earlier articles which tended to identify the St. Bartholomew Italians and the Quarter as distinctive and exotic, even though they quite often reminded readers that the majority of that community had in fact been born in Britain.[98]

Conclusion

During this investigation no evidence has been found which suggests that Italians were perceived as being any better or worse than any other ethnic group in Britain. Indeed, the findings of this chapter suggest that the attitude held in Birmingham was that the St. Bartholomew Italians were either 'undesirable' or 'different' from the host society.

The opinions held by the local press about immigrants in Britain seem to have been similar to those of politicians and social commentators, namely that the St. Bartholomew Italians were a harmful influence and social deviants. These opinions were demonstrated in the tone and content of the articles they printed. However, whilst there is abundant evidence which illustrates the disparaging attitude of the press and that these were transmitted to their readership, it is impossible to assess the extent to which the press influenced local opinion. What has become apparent during this investigation is that the types of abuse the St. Bartholomew Italians received from the local working class population were similar to the opinions expressed by journalists.

Although animosity existed between the local host society and St. Bartholomew Italians for at least the first thirty years of the existence of the Quarter, it is clear that not all members of society held derogatory views. The Medical Officer of Health, Dr. John Robertson, and social workers were sympathetic towards the St. Bartholomew Italian population, and many members of the local working class population also demonstrated a friendliness. Even so, although the St. Bartholomew Italians were accepted as neighbours and perhaps friends, there were limits, for many of the marriages between members of the Quarter and the host society experienced

---

[98] *B'ham Daily Mail*, 30.10.34 and 10.4.38.

animosity. Furthermore, although there was a sharp decline in the number of opprobrious press articles during the 1920s and 1930s, those which did appear made it clear they believed that the St. Bartholomew Italians shared a culture different from that of the host society.

Chapter 7 - CONCLUSION

Having presented the evidence in relation to work, society and how the St. Bartholomew Italians were perceived by the host society, conclusions will now be discussed and an explanation offered about what factors helped to sustain the Italian Quarter for upwards of fifty years. The investigation suggests that a synergy of influences conspired against the relocation of St. Bartholomew Italians. These include the hostility they experienced from some members of Birmingham's population; the attempts of the St. Bartholomew Italians to resist acculturation; and their financial circumstances.

One of the reasons that the St. Bartholomew Italians did not move away from the Quarter until the 1930s was most probably due to the animosity they experienced. This took two major forms: derogatory comments made by the local press, and personal abuse from people living outside the community. During the first thirty years of living in the Quarter, the press presented the St. Bartholomew Italians as 'undesirables', and subjected them to the negative stereotyping imposed on other immigrants in Britain. Through the types of articles the press selected for publication the image was spread that the Italian Quarter was ruled by padroni and Birmingham's city centre and suburban streets were worked by Italian beggars and criminals. Newspapers suggested that immigrants as a whole had the worst possible traits of any social group, and encouraged the notion that the public should be wary of the St. Bartholomew Italians.

However, the attitude of the press changed during the 1920s and 1930s when instead of portraying the St. Bartholomew Italians as social deviants, newspapers presented them merely as 'different' from the host society. In the years immediately preceding World War Two, press articles were fewer and less negative about the Quarter and its inhabitants than during the period leading up to World War One. Rather than the emphasis of articles being on the criminal elements of the St. Bartholomew Italian community, the press focused on the cultural differences between

them and the host society. The marked change in the tone of the newspapers from the early 1920s suggest that attitudes altered from suspicion to fascination. Furthermore, even though for much of the period the majority of St. Bartholomew Italian community comprised British born inhabitants, they were perceived as an ethnic group and therefore outsiders. Their attitude demonstrated a fundamental point: the St. Bartholomew Italians were not integrated into the wider Birmingham society.

Even though antipathy in the press declined during the period, personal hostility continued to be experienced by individuals living in the Quarter. It is clear from the testimonies given by St. Bartholomew Italians that the abuse they and their families were subjected to was upsetting and sufficient to have created apprehension about dispersing into the suburbs. Thus the St. Bartholomew Italians demonstrated similar behaviour and reactions against their marginalisation and restricted integration as have immigrant groups elsewhere.[1] Living in relatively isolated communities, in groups which shared a similar culture and sense of group identity, helped to provide some measure of security

The isolation of the St. Bartholomew Italians was not the only means used to defend themselves. The Italian Quarter was originally founded on an ethnic association between members of the first generation who pursued ethnicity in similar ways to those Panayi described (Chapter 1), through endogamy and close residential proximity. Although a strong ethnic identity existed and cultural practices were particularly common among first generation women, all generations throughout the period embraced Italian culture such as food and language, and the traditional methods of celebrating the rites of passage.

However, even though Italian culture persisted within the Quarter, there is evidence that their ethnicity became diluted with British working-class identity. This was especially the case among the second and third generations of St. Bartholomew

---

[1]B.S. Phillips, *Sociology: Social Structure and Change, Macmillan,* 1969; J.M. Yinger, "Intersecting Strand in the Theorisation of Race and Ethnic Relations", J. Rex & D. Mason (eds), 1994.

Italians, the vast majority of whom were socialised and educated in Britain. The development of a British working-class identity was particularly common among males of the second and third generations and was in part, a consequence of the greater freedom they had than females to associate with non-Italians.

The importance of retaining an ethnic identity declined among these men in comparison with the older generation of St. Bartholomew Italians. Nevertheless group identity remained strong. This was demonstrated in two ways: first, in their attitude towards non-St. Bartholomew Italians who were not regarded as part of their community even though they lived close-by, or in the Quarter; and second in their reaction towards internment in the late 1930s. Their acute awareness of being part of a community which was not integrated into the wider society helped to keep the St. Bartholomew Italians together.

The reactions of the St. Bartholomew Italians against marginalisation and their attempts to resist acculturation all were influential contributors to the sustainment of the Italian Quarter. Even so, although social determinants were important, probably the most crucial factor was economic. Some of the St. Bartholomew Italians who declined to relocate did so because it was more convenient to remain where they had work links. These included craftsmen and maintenance men, in addition to musicians and ice-cream workers, who altogether created a micro-economy on which the majority of St. Bartholomew Italian families were dependent.

However, although there were those who chose to remain in the Quarter, a far greater number were simply unable to afford to move to the suburbs. The St. Bartholomew Italians arrived in Britain in the 1890s in a poor economic condition and during the period had very few opportunities to improve their financial circumstances. It was probably not until World War One, when they were employed as munitions workers, that the St. Bartholomew Italians received regular wages for the first time. Until then the majority of workers in the Quarter were employed in poorly paid Italianate occupations which were seasonal and/or unreliable. Even when employment became available in the terrazzo trade, during the 1920s, the work and wages were

irregular. Their difficulties in relation to poor incomes were compounded by their large families, which averaged approximately 5.6 children, and meant that many St. Bartholomew Italians probably lived on or just above the poverty line. Evidence from respondents suggests that poverty was widespread in the Quarter, and Chapter 5 demonstrated how some mothers coped with inadequate house-keeping money by using the pawnbrokers and cutting back on the amount of food they and their children ate. It was not uncommon, even for mothers of large families, to try to increase the household income by working as part-time street musicians or ice-cream vendors. Despite their endeavours, many relied on food or money, or both, given by members of their extended families on whom they developed a strong dependency.

In answer to the question what sustained the Italian Quarter for upwards of fifty years, it has been demonstrated that the influence of group identity was considerable for it provided reassurance. However, this was not necessarily an ethnic group identity, even though the St. Bartholomew Italians were perceived as such by members of Birmingham's population. Furthermore, the antipathy of the host society towards the St. Bartholomew Italians and the hostility they experienced were sufficiently significant to create hesitation about relocating to the suburbs. Yet, despite these factors the most important determinant was economic. The micro-economy within the Quarter on which the majority of inhabitants depended, and their irregular and insufficient incomes, suggest that relocation was not possible until at least until the 1920s. Therefore the St. Bartholomew Italians had few alternatives but to remain in the Quarter where they could depend on the financial and material help from family members.

The conclusions drawn in this thesis, and indeed the topics which have been investigated, owe much to the particular methodological approach adopted. Small immigrant community studies are comparatively rare in Britain. This in part, is because such studies seem to be considered as unimportant, and also because sources are usually limited and disparate, which means that research is both difficult and time

consuming. The latter problems are particularly pertinent in relation to the period under investigation in this study, unlike studies about nineteenth century communities, which can utilise the demographic and occupational information contained in the census. This research has not benefited from the census to any great extent, nor has there been access to local government or social investigations since very few were conducted into the St. Bartholomew Italian population. Other common sources of evidence for community studies are private papers and documents, yet in this study these have also remained elusive. Nonetheless, despite these problems, the sources located have, surprisingly, proved sufficiently abundant to enable a thorough investigation.

The direction taken by any research is very much dictated by the materials available for scrutiny. The types of evidence which have yielded the most information about St. Bartholomew Italians have been oral testimonies, the Aliens Registers and local newspapers. These are sources that have been overlooked by most scholars investigating Italians in Britain.[2] In addition to the valuable information they provide about St. Bartholomew Italians, they have permitted an examination of topics not previously studied in depth in relation to Italians in Britain. Because the majority of past research relied on information gathered from the census, local and national government reports and social investigations, the scope of research was limited and many aspects of community life were neglected. As a consequence, Italian historiography was restricted to topics relating to male workers, patterns of migration and primary areas of settlement. However, the types of evidence used in this research have made it possible for a close examination of the lives of St. Bartholomew Italian women, generational change and continuity, inter-community relations, neighbourhood dynamics and development of group identities.

---

[2]The investigations made by Carl Chinn and Doreen Hopwood into the Italian Quarter in B'ham both use oral evidence, but in a more limited way than it has been used here.

Conclusion

Almost ten years ago C. Holmes made two criticisms of Italian immigrant research in Britain: the first was that most investigations had been carried out by scholars who were not historians.[3] The second was that although there was abundant understanding about the first generation of Italian settlers, information about the Edwardian and post-World War Two periods was scarce. More recently knowledge about Italian immigrants in Britain during the post-World War Two period has significantly increased.[4] However, very little research had been conducted into Italian communities during the period from the beginning of the twentieth century to World War Two. The consequence of this historiographical gap was almost total ignorance about the period when the children and grandchildren of the initial Italian settlers were reaching adulthood and raising their families. This had the impact of interrupting knowledge about the chronological development of Italian communities in Britain, and details were almost non-existent about changes and continuities between and within generations. Furthermore, although Sponza's research provided insights into neighbourhood interaction, the extent of integration, host community reactions and relations during the nineteenth century, very little was known about these aspects of Italian and host community life in the twentieth century. It is hoped that this research has helped to correct some of the previous shortfall in Italian historiography.

The focus of this study on a small community has complemented knowledge about the national and larger Italian communities, which though informative, tend to generalise unduly. Past research has concentrated on a very narrow range of

---

[3]C. Holmes, "Historians and Immigration", C.G. Pooley and I.D. Whyte (eds), *A Social History of Migration*, Routledge, 1991, p 193.

[4]A number of studies about Italians in Britain include at least a chapter about the World War Two period. For examples see, D. Cesarani and T. Kushner (eds), "The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain", *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol. II, Nov. 1992; P Di Felice, *The Italian Community in Manchester, 1880-1945: A Study in Immigration, Settlement, Ethnicity and Identity*, M.Phil thesis, Salford University, 1996; T. Colpi, "Origins and Campanilismo in Bedford's Italian Community, L. Sponza and A. Tosi (eds), *Supplement to the Italianist*, No. 13, Biddles, 1993.

occupations, namely those connected with fixed catering outlets. However, the study has revealed that a much wider occupational structure existed in the Italian Quarter in Birmingham than has previously been acknowledged, and Chapter 4 demonstrated that although the ice-cream trade was important, equally so was work in the terrazzo trade. Even though it has not been possible to provide more than approximate indications of the wages earned by these workers, this research has identified important aspects of working conditions and practices. The investigation has also shown clearly that the introduction of terrazzo work in the Quarter was an important phase in its occupational development, which is a factor not previously acknowledged in Italian immigrant historiography in Britain.

Another important contribution which this research has made to Italian historiography is in relation to the work and lives of Italian women. Despite the encouragement given by N. Di Blasio and B. Sereni over thirty years ago, the role of Italian women in the community remains a neglected topic.[5] As a consequence, Italian women have been subjected to stereotyping which defined their role as mothers confined to the home. To a limited extent that interpretation of Italian women's lives was true, but this study has clearly illustrated that the role of women within the home and community had a much greater significance. For not only did they contribute to the household income by working as street musicians, they worked in the ice-cream trade, and were probably the first members of the community to be employed in work outside the Quarter, in occupations not associated with Italian types of employment. Furthermore, it is probable that women, more than any other single group of people in the community, were responsible for its long-term sustainment, as they attempted to resist acculturation and establish strategies for coping with poverty.

---

[5]N. Di Blasio, "Italian Immigration to Britain: An Ignored Dimenson", *ATI*, 1979, p 19; B. Sereni, *They Took The High Road*, Barga, 1974, p 25.

Conclusion

The direction taken by this thesis has benefited greatly from the impetus created by research into non-Italian immigrant groups in which investigations have been conducted into both the diversity of, and similarities between, different communities.[6] Such studies recognise that research into isolated communities, although important, is limited and that far more is revealed about community behaviour when inter-community relations are examined. The use of a methodology in this research similar to those used by scholars investigating other immigrant groups has helped to expand Italian research. In so far as evidence and scope have permitted, an integrated study has been conducted which examines both the St. Bartholomew Italians and their relations with the wider society. By departing from the more common insular approach of previous Italian immigrant studies this research has identified the differing attitudes held about Italians, and demonstrated that public opinion about, and the reactions towards, St. Bartholomew Italians were complex and fluid.

Furthermore, this type of investigation has clearly demonstrated that the strong ethnic identity, which was considered previously by Italian researchers and described in Chapter 1, as being derived predominantly from a conscious desire to resist acculturation, was only partially correct. St. Bartholomew Italians have not been presented here as merely victims in a racist society, but rather as people who deliberately sought to maintain their identity through their ethnicity. However, different groups in each generation tried to achieve this in a variety of ways, thus demonstrating that the ethnic identity believed in the past to have functioned only in relation to the group can also be seen to have had a value to the individual, male and female. By examining ethnicity in relation to its manifestations *and* purpose(s) it has been clearly illustrated how the ethnic identity of the St. Bartholomew Italians had several purposes which varied in relation to the needs of the individuals within the

---

[6]For example, R. Swift & S. Gilley (eds), *The Irish in Victorian Britain: The Local Dimension*, Four Courts, 1999.

community. As equally as important to Italian historiography, this research has shown the duality of the concept 'ethnicity' and how it is used in different ways in accordance with how a group perceives itself and how it is perceived by others from outside the group. Both immigrants and the indigenous population use this term but each group has a different interpretation of its use and meaning: i.e. ethnicity respectively is a bonding influence between people and defines a group which is marginalised.

In its examination of inter-community relations, this research also provides further insight into Birmingham's local history, and a significant contribution has been made to knowledge about Birmingham's social history during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In addition, this investigation provides much needed information about the currently under-represented history of Birmingham's multi-cultural population.[7] In so doing this research has contributed further evidence of the influences on the long-term economic growth and development of Birmingham in relation to the organisation of Birmingham's labour. As pointed out in Chapter 1 it was the tendency in Birmingham to concentrate on a limited range of manufacturing trades; namely in the metal industries, and these tended towards small workshop management. Such an employment structure may have deterred immigrants working in Birmingham in the short-term and as a consequence restricted occupational diversity in relation to the development of other types of work, i.e. tertiary industries such as catering and entertainment, which were the most common types of employment among Italians elsewhere in Britain from the end of the nineteenth century.

Overall then, it is believed that this thesis makes several important contributions about, to knowledge about and the understanding of, Italian immigrant life in Britain during a period which has received only limited attention in the past.

---

[7]Both A. Briggs and E. Hopkins have researched Birmingham, yet neither have provided information about its immigrant population. One of the few researchers whose work consistently endeavours to include aspects of immigrant history is Carl Chinn.

However, in common with all research, its scope is restricted and Italian historiography still lags behind the knowledge and understanding we have about other immigrant groups. Thus, it is hoped that at least some of the findings of this thesis provide a basis and stimulus for future research, and that these help to expand the current range of topics and deepen knowledge about the Italians and their descendants who lived in Britain.

Most importantly the conclusions drawn in this study require testing against other small Italian communities in Britain, and questions need to be asked which will help to reveal the typicality or otherwise of the small St. Bartholomew Italian community. Too often research has focused on the larger communities even though small Italian enclaves were present in most large towns and cities in Britain. An examination of other small Italian communities would allow comparisons to be made with the larger communities in London, Scotland and Manchester and conclusions drawn about how much the size of a community influenced internal social and economic conditions. Such studies would be particularly useful in assessing the extent and types of neighbourhood interaction, which are other neglected aspects of Italian community life.

In addition to the need for comparisons to be drawn with Italian communities elsewhere and greater attention paid to inter-community relations, much more research is required into the lives of Italian women in Britain. Their importance within the community, and in particular, their role in its sustainment have been demonstrated in this thesis; even so, other questions need to be answered. For example, what happened to those women who married non-Italians and left the community? How did they cope away from their families? What effect did their leaving have on shaping their identities? Was Italian culture pursued by these women? What were the responses of the indigenous population towards them? Such investigations would not only provide a more balanced Italian historiography, but would also enable

comparative studies to be carried out into the role of women in Italian communities and elsewhere.[8]

The investigation into inter-community relations has proved extremely fruitful in this research, and future studies should also consider Italian community and host society interaction, both in relation to attempts made by Italians to resist acculturation and the reactions of the wider society. In the past conclusions have been drawn about the formation of group identity without due consideration being given to the potential impact of extraneous influences on Italian communities. Furthermore, it is not only in relation to the formation and sustainment of identities that host and Italian community interaction should be examined. Chapter 2 revealed social policy in Birmingham in relation to its potential implications for the Italian population there. The conclusions drawn in that chapter were tenuous and limited, primarily because no research is currently available against which a comparison could be made. The attitudes of local communities towards Italians, in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, are aspects of Italian immigrant life which are currently neglected and warrant extensive research. With the exception of L. Sponza's research about Italians in London, little is known about local government policy in relation to immigrant populations during this period.[9]

Chapter 6 identified the attitudes held by Birmingham's population and relied heavily on the information provided by local press articles. The investigation clearly demonstrated the prevalence of anti-immigrant opinions in Birmingham's press, and that they were responsible for spreading derisory images. One of the aims of this research was to identify the local perceptions held about the St. Bartholomew Italian population and to illustrate these within the broader context of contemporary national attitudes. Although it is impossible to assess the extent to which the press influenced

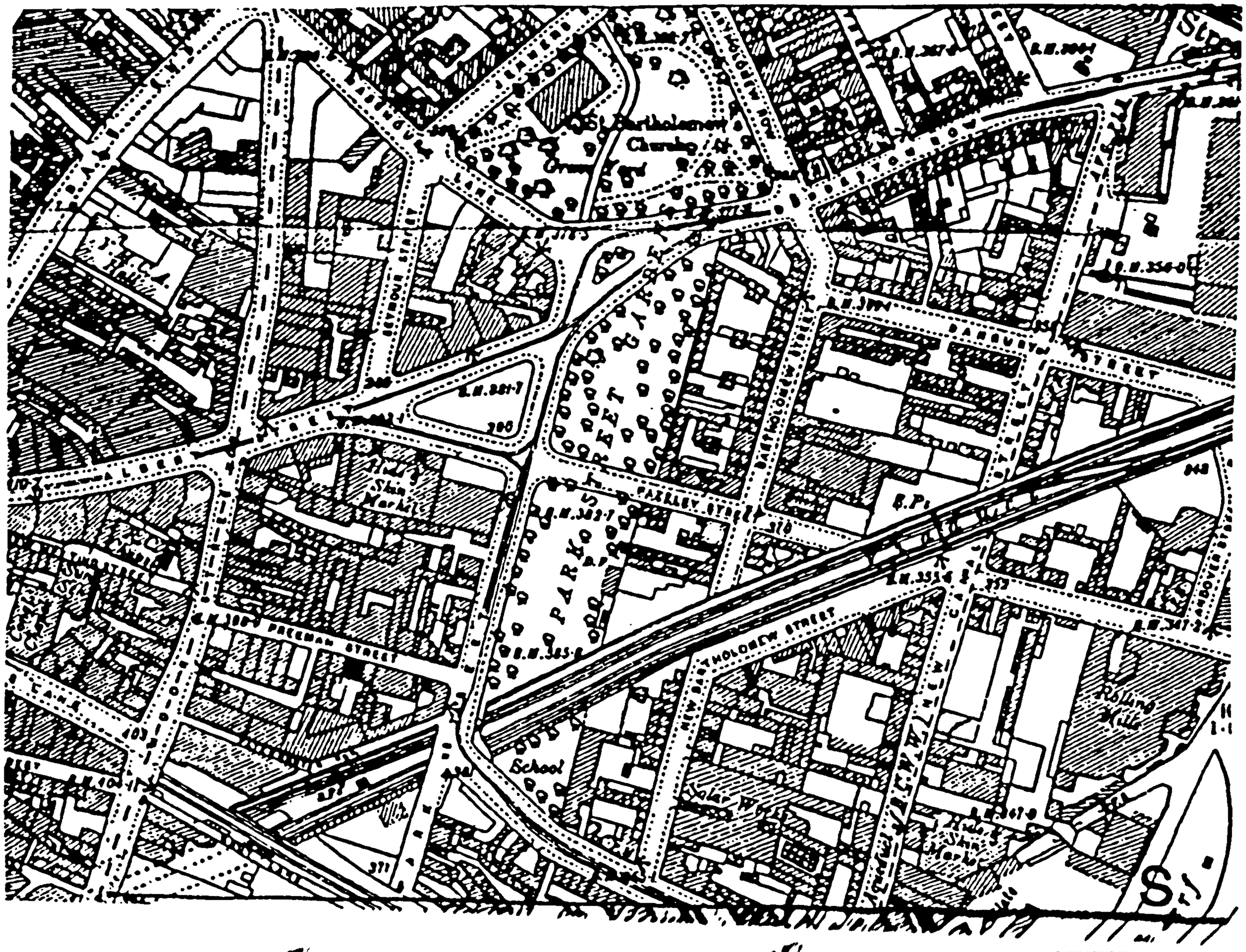
---

[8]Penny Summerfield emphasised the need for greater information about immigrant women in Britain. Conference paper given at Nottingham University, 1998.
[9]L. Sponza, *Italian Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Realities and Images*, Leicester U.P, 1986.

local opinions about immigrants in general, or the St. Bartholomew Italians in particular, such investigations provide a local dimension to a topic more usually investigated at the national level. Research into the local press elsewhere in Britain could compare and contrast the Birmingham and national press and permit their typicality to be assessed.

The research proposals outlined here would not only increase knowledge about Italians, but would also contribute to current debates in relation to community life and women's history in Britain. Furthermore, such investigations would add to immigrant history in general, and would therefore expand our understanding of the European immigrant experience in Britain, which is currently under-represented and remains much more narrow than research into Britain's New Commonwealth population.

Map A Layout of streets within the Italian Quarter.
(taken from Birmingham Ordnance Survey Map, Special Edition), 1912.



Map B Municipal Ward Map, 1911.
(A. Briggs, History of Birmingham, 1865-1938, Vol II, Oxford U.P, 1952, p 169.)

Map C. The St. Bartholomew's area of Birmingham, 1912 (taken from Ordnance Survey Map)

Appendix I
Respondents details:

EBF2001 Born 1927 in Birmingham. Parents Italian.
Lived in Italian Quarter 1927-1936.

FVM3002 Born in 1913 in Birmingham. Parents English.
Paternal grandparents born in Italy.
Lived in Italian Quarter 1913-1930s.

GLF2003 Born in 1904 in Birmingham. Parents Italian.
3 siblings born in Italy.
Lived in Italian Quarter 1904-1932.

VIF2004 Born in Birmingham in 1914. Mother Italian.
Lived in Italian Quarter1914-1939.

HZM1005 Born 1912 in Italy. Parents Italian. All 6 siblings born in Birmingham.
Lived in Italian Quarter c1913-1938.

LGF3006 Born 1920 in Birmingham. Parents English.
Lived in Italian Quarter 1920-1933.
Grandparents born in Italy.

LPM3007 Born in Birmingham in 1921. Father Irish and Mother English.
Maternal grandparents Italian. Lived in Quarter 1921-1934.
Older brother of 009

WFF2008 Born in1923 in Birmingham. Parents Italian.
Lived in Italian Quarter 1923-1947.

NPM3009 Born in Birmingham in1923. Father Irish and Mother English.
Maternal grandparents Italian. Younger brother of 007.

CAM3010 Born in Manchester in 1914. Parents English
Paternal grandfather Italian (grandmother English)
Lived in Italian Quarter 1918 - 1935.

BEF2011 Born in Birmingham in1917. Father Italian, Mother English.
Lived in Italian Quarter 1917-1938.

MDF3012 Born in Birmingham in 1921. Parents English.
Maternal Grandparents Italian.
Lived in Italian Quarter 1921-1936.

MSM1013 Born 1918 in Italy.
Moved to Bradford Street in 1919 from Italy.
Parents from N. Italy - Fanna. Worked with St. Bartholomew Italians
in the terrazzo trade.

MLF2014 Born 1913 in Birmingham. Father and Mother Italian.
Within .5 mile of Italian Quarter between 1913 - c1932.
Went to St. Michael's School and Church. Grandparents lived in Italian Quarter until 1932.

EMF2016 Born in Italy in1924. Father and mother Italian.
Lived in Bradford Street until early 1930s.
Father worked in terrazzo trade with other St. Bartholomew Italians.
Shopped in Quarter and had relatives living there.

GSF2017 Born in Birmingham 1926. Grandmother and Father Italian born.
Lived in Italian Quarter until 1930s.

NHF2018 Born in Birmingham in 1920. Parents Italian.
Lived in Italian Quarter1920-1935.

EBF2020 Born in Birmingham in 1917. Parents Italian.
Lived in Italian Quarter1917 until 1945.

FOF2021 Born in Birmingham in 1926. Parents Italian.
Lived in Italian Quarter 1926 until late 1930s.

RFM2024 Born in Birmingham in 1922. Parents Italian.
Lived in Quarter from 1922-1940.

EMF2025 Born in Birmingham in 1923. Parents Italian.
Lived outside Quarter, but shopped there and went to St. Michael's RC School.

MMM2026 Born in Birmingham in 1916. Parents Italian. Lived in Italian Quarter 1914 until end of the 1930s.

JGM3027 Born in Birmingham in 1926. Father 2nd generation Italian. Mother born in Italy. Lived in Italian Quarter 1926-1960s.

LVM3028 Born in Birmingham in 1927. Parents English.
Grandparents Italian. Lived in Italian Quarter 1927-1938.

Appendix II - Sample of transcripts relating to Chapters 4 and 5

Sample 1

Respondent: HZM2005
Born in Italy 1912. Lived in Italian Quarter from 1912.

Interviewer: You said that when they came to England from Italy they went straight to the Italian Quarter, do you know much about that?

Respondent: Well, as far as I know, me father went, y'know Duddeston Row? Now there's a road opposite Duddeston Row which goes up the hill, and I can't remember the name now. I think me father stayed there for a while, because he was very independent y'know, he wanted to move. Y'know he went to America, and he nearly finished up in jail. (laughter). Contraband I think it was, contraband. They forget y'know that in Italy they're a bit *mushy mushy*, they turn a blind eye. They say well, we're all poor. (laughter)

I: So would it have been lodgings he'd have gone to live in, do you think?

R: I can't really say, because my aunt was in Duddeston Row, they were (named) Z----- 's. They'd naturally go there wouldn't they? I have an idea they did get their own home because he did get their own home because it was by Fox Street. They managed to get something like that, because before the family got there he got the start of it, y 'see.

I: Now when you say the family, who do you mean?
R: Family, me family, me mom, brothers and sisters.

I: So you dad came over to England first, found somewhere to live and then sent for the rest of the family?
R: Yes.

I: Have you any idea how long it took him to find somewhere?
R: Well it has just come to my memory, which is a truthful statement. He moved y'know.
Respondent begins to talk and then forgets what he was going to say)

I: It doesn't matter, it will probably come back to you when we're talking. What work did you father do

when he got here?

R: Well like all Italians, they done a bit of barrel-organ and then he started the terrazzo trade. Actually he was one of the very few that made the terrazzo rade and built the terrazzo trade in a way where he done massive work. The General Hospital was the big work, in just turned 1900 I'm gonna say, when the General Hospital was either built or altered, and he did a lot of work. I remember because eventually went there in later years. Repairing work.

I: Did you work in the terrazzo as well?

R: Yes.

I: Which company was this?

R: avino Flooring. I took Z------- Brothers over then Pavino closed up and I took his company over.

I: So how long was the Z-------- Brothers company established?

R: I'd say before the second world war. Because that's when I started then, I was with the Panicali Brothers. Nice firm. Good to you and I decided to start on my own. And I started and I went one way and I became bigger than Panicali's.

I: Who did your father work for?

R: (Son who is also present at interview answers) Diespekers of London.

I: And that was before the first world war?

R: It could have been the first world war.

I: Because according to this (Aliens Registers) he's working for Mr. Turner at Kings Heath.

R: That's right yes.

I: Is that where Dispechers were (located)?

R: No. He worked with Turner's company, he was associated with Turner. Turner was the gentlemen who got the work. You had to have a side-kick to run about, if you wanted to get the work. To do things in a system, you had to have someone to run around - the builders and architects and view them you see, well me father y'see was really broken English, and he couldn't deal with them.

I: So, in today's terms then, he would be called a rep?

R: Yes that's right. I must say this. With all due

respect, I'm quoting this, he might have been working as a silent partnership or on a percentage or something. They used to strike a hard bargain in them days.

I: So he could have had quite a bit to do with the company then? And not just have been a representative?

R: Yes, you'd need somebody because he could hardly speak English. And he became a good friend to me father, because he had to have a man who knows his job y'know. Terrazzo is a very intricate job. There are a number of patterns and colours you have to do and inscribed names in it, and all that. And you can't afford to make a mistake y'know? Because if you make mistake then that's where the money is. Because once it's down, it's in sand foundation, like concrete.

I: To recap. Did he(father) do the two jobs (organ-grinding and terrazzo flooring) together, or did he pack up the organ-grinding?

R: In my opinion, I think he might have done a little bit of each. Because y'see he never believed in putting two birds in the bush. He believed in having two things going. He believed in two things rather than one.

I: So you believe he would have done the organ-grinding too.

R: Because remember, at that particular time, doing back to the years turned 1900 and something, the work was very distinctive. It was very scarce. You have to work really hard. To push it you see.

I: Is this the flooring?

R: Yes, the flooring.

I; What other buildings did he work on?

R: The Grange Cinema, the Newtown Cinema and then he done the General Hospital. Bartons Arms. Oh yes, that was a very noted piece of work that was.

Sample 2

Responent: GLF2003
Date of birth: 1904. Born in the Italian Quarter. Italian parents, and two older sisters and one brother.

Interviewer: What sort of work did your parents do whilst they lived in the Italian Quarter?

Respondent: My mother didn't do anything. My father, he would go out with ice-cream.

I: (Ice-cream) That he made himself?
R: Yes.

I: Where was they made? Because if you lived in a little house ...
R: In this great big yard. We had a great big yard and my father had loads of sheds. And they used to make it there.

I: When you say "they", do you mean other Italians or your family?
R: Well, you see the woman next door to us was Italian. Actually they were all Italians. But there were nice English people in the road, got a coffee house and, because we were right by Curzon St goods station (railway yard), so they had a coffee shop and they all used to go there y'know. Very nice people.

I: The Italians used to go there?
R: No, the people off the er, goods station.

I: You say that all these Italian families, and your dad had these sheds where the ice-cream was made? The families would use these sheds would they? To make their ice-cream?
R: Some of them yes.

I: How many families made ice-cream?
R: Nearly all of them. Nearly all of them. You see they didn't know anything else. Because, actually, those that came altogether were in Southern Italy where its all farms, and things like that. Until my mother came to England, she was on a farm. And she had three children in Italy, and she came to England and she had Bet and me.

Sample 3

Respondent:NPM3009
Date of birth: 1925. Born in Birmingham in the Italian Quarter. Mother's parents were both Italian. Father English.

Interviewer: You took the ice-cream out at weekends didn't you? Can you just tell me about that.

Respondent: Yea. I used to go down the Parade, Nelson Street. Only a couple of miles or so. (Explains where the Parade used to be.) I used to go and stand on the corner there. And this friend of mine used to stay with me, and of course if we used to see a copper I used to do it in me trousers nearly, cos I was under age,see. Thirteen.

I: Did you ever get summonds?

R: No. No never got pulled up. And when he didn't come with me, I used to be really ... y'know.

I: Did you like selling the ice-cream?

R: No. No. Because I was under age. I dunno how I'd 'ave bin if I'd bin of age. But I was always worried I might get pulled up, y'see. But I only took it out cos this chap who used to live with us one day he'd just vanish. He used to do it like that. Then come back again. He'd go on the road. Like a tramp for days, and then come back again. But he went for quite a few weeks, so of course, while he was away I took it out.

I: What would you estimate your daily takings as?

R: 13/-, 14/-? If I dun anymore than that I'd had a good day!

I: And did you get paid for that?

R: No.

I: So did you do it to help your parents because they needed the money?

R: Well I think so yea. It was part of life, if you put it like that. Well dad hadn't really got a job then. He used to take the ice-cream out and we used to take it out like. It was all part of life. Part of money coming in to help like y'know. And if it rained well, you'd be pushin' it in the rain and wondering how much you was gonna do, cos people wouldn't come out if it was raining if they could help it.

Sample 4

CAM3101

Born in Manchester in 1914. Parents English. Paternal grandfather Italian. Lived in Italian Quarter, 1917-1938.

Interviewer: Did your mother work when she had the 6 children?
Respondent: Oh yes. But she'd only got the 3 of us then

I: So who looked after you whilst your mom went out to work?
R: Me grandmother. Yea.

I: What work did your sisters do?
R: Well Patty, she worked at the Brush factory. And me other sister she worked there for a bit. She got 'er a job.

I: What sort of date would this be?
R: Round about 'um, 1940s that 'ud be.

I: So you moved away from Bartholomew Street, and then your sisters went back to work there?
R: That's right.

I: What did they do before the war? Can you remember?
R: They hardly did anything. They didn't do a lot. Mostly housework, y'know.

I: So your mom was having children even when she was forty years of age?
R: Oh yea. I think she had two born dead during that period.

About his own English wife.

I: How did you meet her?
R: I used to go to a dance down Aston. I met her at a dancehall.

I: And what did she say when you told her you were part Italian?
R: She liked it. (laughs). She liked it. She though, y'know, a foreigner, me being a foreginer, "he's a big man", "he's a big man, he is" (laughs) "Oh he's Italian".

I: Did being Italian help you to get the women?
R: Oh yea! I was a big man, I was. (laughs) I was Italian. "Oh, he's Italian he is!"

I: So were Italians generally like then?

R: Oh yea. Usually.

I: You didn't have any problems telling people you were Italian?

R: No they got on very well. The Italians with the English people. Course, while we lived in Bartholomew Street: there used to be a few Italians come over from Italy and they stayed there, y'know. Their relations used to fetch 'em over. And they'd stay there and they all went into the marble work. Terrazzo floorin' (with prompting). They all went into terrazzo, it was a job it would do.

Sample 5

MDF3012

Born in Birmingham in 1921. Parents English. Maternal grandmother Italian. Lived in Italian Quarter 1921-1936.

Iinterviewer: Did you feel living in the It Quarter English or Italian?

Respondent: I was alright when we was actually in the there, but outside ... (away from the Italian Quarter) I always used to feel people looked down on ya. I remember when me an' Mary used to goo 'chappin' it, we used to call it. You'd got a fella like, they'd bring ya ome. Tek you the top of, by Albert St. They'd ony gotta know you lived in the 'Talian Quarter, "We're not gonna come any farther with ya, we dun what a knife in our backs!" The 'Talian Quarter was a ghetto. To the outside. I mean we knew it wasn't, but the outside people (it was). Now there was an old man who lived next door but one here. We got talking one day. He'd worked on the railway for years. Out of the blue he said "I used to work at the railway in Lander St ... I used to hate the night shift. I used to have to walk up Curzon St and I used to hate that 'Talian Quarter. I used to get frightened at passing it." The outsiders must have a thought we was terrible.

I: Did you ever see any knives when you was in the Italian Quarter?

R: No, not really. There used to be one or two fights an 'that, but it was never really with the Italians, it was the English people who lived there.

I: Why do you think the Italians got a bad reputation?

R: I don't know, but them as used to go out with the ice-cream and the 'taters, used to always be shouted at. Our mom used to say, they used to shout after her, "ice-creamio" and it hurts me, even now, I can't stand anybody calling the Italians WOP. I hate it! I hate that word!

I: Did it hurt your monther's feelings?

R: I don't think it did. Her'd probably give em their answer back.

Sample 6

REM2024

Born in Birmingham in 1922. Parents Italian. Lived in the Quarter from 1922-1940.

Interviewer: Were the boys treated any differently in terms of what they were allowed to do? Freedom?

Respondent: Yes well the girls used to be kept at home. The girls were kept in and the boys used to go out. From what I can remember it was all boys. There was one or two girls, but not as many, not in comparison with the boys.

I: What sort of things did you do?

R: There used to gangs, in them days. Street gangs. We used to have street gangs. We'd fight the ones down in Buck Street or somewhere like that. They were like kids street gangs. We used to have the gangs down from Buck Street and round there. You'd just click in with them. St. Michael's school gang. The Buck Street lads came from a non-Catholic school, I can't remember the name of it. The Italians all went to Catholic schools. I don't think it was so much the religion, y'know, it was just kids. The gang was predominantly Catholic, there was English in it as well. If some of their kids used to come over, y'know, and upset any of our kids. There was a little bit of territorial. Silly things. Any excuse for a fight. We used to carry sticks. That was one reason why my mother sent me away. Never carried knives. We used to hide our sticks from our parents. We used to hide them in our separate places, didn't we.

I: Did the police ever get involved?

R: No, but some of them did. I never got caught, to be honest. But the police were called in for the fights.

I: Did you get paid for your work in the shop?

R: No, no. We used to get a bit of pocket money. Not much, but a bit. My mother was quite a strict person. Not that I regret it now, but we used to regret it in them days. When you see it now they knew what was going on, much more than we did. So you can understand them being why they were like that. Because you see she didn't want us to get into trouble. Because a lot of the kids were getting into trouble. Y'see me dad was at work, me mother had the business, and me and me sister to look after. And they used to work 'til about half-past five at night. Start at about 8 o'clock. He be working, say in Dudley, Wolverhampton and all over the place. It's not as if he just worked in B'ham. And then he'd be out of town as well, y'see. So I mean mom was on her own with the two kids and the business.

I: Do you think she was ever likely to have put any pressure on him (her husband) to do another job?

R: Well no. No. In them days it wasn't, jobs weren't easy to come by and then y'see, that's what they wanted to do, and that's what he enjoyed doing. Then y'see everybody spoke Italian on the job ... if they went into another trade they'd be all English. And where my mother used to have the shop in Duddeston Road we used to have all the people making the ice-cream in there, y'know. We used to have all the handcarts and everybody had their compartments where they kept their handcarts and stuff. Mom used to rent that out. And where the boiler was there, where they used to boil up the ice-cream.

I: How many Italians used you mom's premises to make ice-cream at this time?

R: There used to be roughly 10 or 15.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Newpapers, periodicals and journals

The Architects's Journal,Vol 77, 1933.
Aris's Gazette.
Birmingham Daily Gazette.
Birmingham Daily Mail.
Birmingham Daily Post.
Birmingham Sunday Despatch.
Catholic Parish Magazine, Jan, 1912-Dec, 1913.
The Modern Trader, 1931-1936.
St. Chad's RC Parish Magazine, 1902-1911.
St. Michael's RC Parish Magazine.

Police and judicial records

Birmingham Aliens Registers, 1916-1918.
Birmingham Petty Sessions Court Registers (various)
*Birmingham Juvenille Court Registers (*various)
Birmingham Quarter Sessions Registers (various)
Birmingham Police Orders,1847 -1917.
Birmingham Watch Committee Reports (various)

Local government, health and housing reports and records

Birmingham Juvenile Organisation Committe, 1st Report, 1925.
Birmingham Medical Officer of Health Reports, 1895, 1901-1938.
Birmingham Medical Officer of Health Report on the Floodgate Street Area, 1904.
Birmingham Public Health & Housing Department Report to the Chairman and Members on the Public Health and Housing Committee. Child Welfare in 1913.
Birmingham Rates Books, 1911, Vol 14 and 1919.
Birmingham Watch Committee Reports (various)
Corporation of Birmingham Report of Special Housing Enquiry, 1914.
J. Pentland's Street Robins Annual Reports, 1902-1910.
Report of the Bishop of Birmingham's Committee on Street Trading in Birmingham,1910.
Report on the Health and Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Birmingham, 1842.
Report on Survey of Housing Conditions in Birmingham,1934.

National Reports

Decennial Population Census of England and Wales, (1841-1931).
Parliamentary Papers, Aliens Bill, 4th series, Vol 58, 23.5.98.
Parliamentary Papers, Aliens Bill, 4th series, Vol 58, 20.6.98.
Parliamentary Papers, Sale of Ice-Cream in the Streets, 4th series, Vol 59, 23.6.1898.
Parliamentary Papers, Royal Commission on Alien Immigration, 1903-4, EdwVII, Vols1-4,
Parliamentary Papers, 5th Annual Report on the Expulsion of Aliens, 1911, Vol X.
Index of Public General Acts, Aliens Act, 1905, Edw VII.
Index of Public General Acts, Aliens Restrictions Act, 1914, Geo V, lV & V.
Index of Public General Acts, Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act, 1919, Geo V, lX & X.

Trade Directories

Kelly's Directory, 1883, 1886,1910, 1920, 1931, 1938.
Pigot & Co., National and Commercial Directory for Warks, 1828, 1829, 1830,1835
Pye's Directory, 1787,1788,1789, 1791, 1797.
Triennal Birmingham Directory, 1825
Wrightson's Directory for Birmingham, 1833.

Church Records

St. Chad's Cathedral R.C. Baptism and Marriage Registers.
St. Michael's R.C. Baptism and Marriage Registers.
St. Peter's R.C. Baptism and Marriage Registers.

Contemporary Texts

C. Albericci, (unpublished autobiography).
Cadbury Trust, *When We Build Again*, Allen & Unwin, 1941.
J. Cuming-Walters, "Scenes in Slumland", *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 1901.
G.C. Mainwaring, *Mainwaring is My Name*, (unpublished autobiography), 1986.
H.S. Pelham, *Street Trading By Children*, 1910.
E.E. Perry & I.T. Barclay, *500 Birmingham Houses*, 1929.
B.S. Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, London, 1902.
R. H. Sherard, "The Child Slaves of Birmingham", in *The Child Slaves of Britain*, 1905.
A. White, *The Destitute Alien in Great Britain*, 1892.

General Reading

S. Alexander, *Becoming a Woman,* Virago,1994.

S. Allen, "Race, Ethnicity and Nationality: Some questions of Identity", H.Afshar & M. Maynard (eds), *The Dynamics of Race & Gender. Some Feminist Interventions,* Taylor & Francis,1994.

P. Bailey, *Leisure, & Class in Victorian Britain,* Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978.

D. Baines, *Emigration from Europe, 1815-1930,* Cambridge University Press, 1995.

R & C. Ballard, "The Sikhs: The Development of South Asian Settlements in Britain", J. Watson, *Between Two Cultures: Immigrants & Minorities in Britain,* Blackwell, 1977.

E. Balibar & I.Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities,* Verso, 1991.

P. Barber & P. Jacomelli, *Continental Taste: Ticinese emigrants and their Cafe-Restaurants in Britain, 1847-1987,* Camden History Society Occasional Paper, 1997.

P. Bartley, Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914, Routledge, 2000.

J. Beaumont-Hughes, "The Press & the Public During the Boer War, 1899-1902", *The Historian,* 61, 1999.

C. Behagg, "Custom, Class & Change: the trade societies of Birmingham", *Social History,* 1979.

J. Benson, *The Rise of the Consumer Society in Britain, 1880-1980,* Longman, 1994.

J. Benson, *The Working-Class In Britain, 1850-1939,* Longman, 1989.

J. Benson, "Hawking & Peddling in Canada, 1867-1914", *History Society,* XVIII, 1985.

J. Benson (ed), *The Working-Class in England, 1875-1914,* Croom Helm, 1984.

J. Benson, *The Penny Capitalists: A Study of Nineteenth Century Working-Class Entrepreneurs,* Gill & Macmillan, 1983.

V. Bevan, *The Development of British Immigration Law,* Croom Helm, 1986.

J.C. Bird, *The Control of Enemy Aliens Civilians in Great Britain, 1914-1918,* Garland, 1986.

E.J. Bodnar, *The Transplanted. A History of Immigrants in Urban America,* Indiana University Press, 1987.

B. Bottignolo, *Without A Bell Tower. A Study of the Italian Immigrants in S.W. England,* Centro Studi Emigrazione,1985.

J. Boughton, "Working-Class Conservatism & the Rise of Labour", *The Historian,* Autumn, 1998.

J. Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: Gender, Class & Ethnicity,* Routledge, 1994.

C. Boyce-Davis, *Black Women, Writing and Identity. Migrations on the Subject,* Routledge,1984.

J. Burnett, *A Social History of Housing, 1815-1970,* David & Charles,1978.

H. Bradley, *Men's Work, Women's Work,* Polity Press, 1992.

A. Bravo, "Italian Peasant Women & the First World War", C. Emsley, A. Marwick & W. Simpson (eds), *War, Peace & social change in Twentieth Century Europe,* Open University Press, 1989.

A. Briggs, *History of Birmingham, 1865-1938,* Oxford University Press,1952.

L. Caldwell, "Church, State & Family: the Women's Movement in Italy", A. Kuhn & A Wolpe (eds), *Feminism & Materialism,* Routledge, Kegan & Paul, 1978.

S. Castles & Kosack, *Immigrant Workers & Class Structure in Western Europe*, 1973.
D. Cesarani & T. Kushner (eds), "The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain", *Immigrants & Minorities*, Vol. II, November, 1992.
C. Chinn, " 'Sturdy Catholic Emigrants': the Irish in early Victorian Birmingham", R. Swift and S. Gilley (eds), *The Irish in Victorian Britain. The Local Dimension*, Four Courts Press, 1999.
C. Chinn, *Poverty Amidst Prosperity: The Urban Poor in England, 1834-1914*, Manchester University Press, 1995.
C. Chinn, "We all come from round Sora: Italians in Birmingham, c1821-1919", O.Ashton, R. Fyson & S. Roberts (eds), *The Duty of Discontent. Essays for Dorothy Thompson*, Mansell, 1995.
C.Chinn, *Birmingham: The Great Working City*, Birmingham City Council, 1994.
C. Chinn, *Homes For People: Hundred Years of Council Housing in Birmingham*, Wheaton,1991.
C. Chinn, "The Anatomy of a Working-Class Neighbourhood, West Sparkbrook, 1871-1914", PhD, Birmingham University, 1986.
T. Colpi, *The Italian Factor*, Edinburgh, 1991.
T. Colpi, "The Italian Community in Glasgow with Special Reference to Spatial Development", *Assoc. of Teachers of Italian, (ATI)*, Vol. 29, 1979.
S. Cordery, "Friendly Societies & the Discourse of Respectablility in Britain, 1825-1875", *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 34, 1995.
R.W.Connell, "Gender Regimes & Gender Roles", *Polity Reader of Gender Studies*, Polity Press, 1987.
H. Cunningham, "Leisure", J. Benson (ed), 1984.
S. D'Cruze, "Women and the Family", J. Purvis and contributors, *Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945*, UCL, 1995.
C. Dauphin, et al, "Women's Culture & Women's Power: Issues in French Women's History", J. Wallach-Scott, (ed), *Feminism and History*, Oxford University Press, 1996.
A. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty. Working-Class culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939*, Open University Press, 1992.
R. Dennis, *English Industrial Cities of the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, 1974.
N. Di. Blasio, "Italian Immigration to Britain: An Ignored Dimension", *ATI*, Vol. 29, 1979.
E. Divo, *Irlandais et Italiens dans le quartier de St. Bartholomew a Birmingham a la fin du 19th siecle, 1871-1891*, unpublished Memoire de Maitrise d'Histoire, Universite de Franche-Comte, 1993.
C. Emsley, *Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900*, Longman, 1987.
D. Englander, *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain, 1838-1919*, Clarendon, 1983.
M. Engels, *Tickle the Public.One Hundred Years of the Popular Press*, London, 1996.
P. Di Felice, "Italians in Manchester, 1891-1939: settlement and occupations", *The Local Historian*, Vol 30, No 2, May, 2000.
P. Di Felice, "Manchester's Little Italy", *Manchester Region History Review*, Vol. 12,1998.

P. Di Felice, *The Italian Community in Manchester, 1880-1945: A study in Immigration, Settlement, Ethnicity and Identity,* MPhil thesis, Salford University, 1996.

R. Firth, "Kinship Organisation of Italiantes in London", D. Garigue & R. Firth, (eds), *Two Studies of Kinship in London,* London University Press,1956.

W.J.Fishman, "Allies in the Promised Land: Reflections on the Irish and the Jews in the East End", A.J. Kershen (ed), 1997.

R.F. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times,* Arno Press, New York, 1919.

F.L. Galassi & J.S. Cohen, "The Economy of Tenancy in early twentieth century South Italy", *Economic History Review*, XLVII, 2, 1994.

H. Gans, "Urbanisation and Suburbanisation as Ways of Life: A Re-evaluation of Definitions", A. Rose (ed), *Human Behaviour and the Social Processes,* Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972.

J.A. Garrard, *The English and Immigration,* London, 1971.

A. Godley, Leaving the East End: Regional Mobility among Eat European Jews in London, 1880-1914", A.J. Kershen (ed), 1997.

B. Gray, "The Home of Our Mothers and Our Birthright for Ages? Nation, Diaspora and Irish Women", M. Maynard and J. Purvis (eds), 1996.

D.R. Green, & A.G. Parton, "Slums and Slum Life in Victorian England, London and Birmingham at Mid-Century", S.M. Gaskell (ed), *Slums,* Leicester University Press,1990.

D.R. Green, "Little Italy in Victorian London: Holborn's Italian Community", *Camden History Review,*15, 1988.

D.R. Green, "Street Trading in London: A Case Study of Casual labour, 1930-60", J.H. Johnson & C.G. Pooley (eds), *The Structure of Nineteenth Century Cities,* Croom Helm, 1982.

C. Hall, "The butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker: the shop and family in the Industrial Revolution", R.J. Morris and R. Rodger (eds), 1993.

O. Handlin, "Immigration in American Life: a Reappraisal", H.S. Commager (ed), *Immigration and American History,* University of Minnesota, 1960.

C. Harris (ed), *Family, Economy and Community,* University of Wales, 1990.

H. Hearder, *Italy: A Short History*, Cambridge, 1990.

E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Birmingham,* Arnold, 1973.

C. Heward & R. Whipp, "Juvenile Labour in Birmingham: A Notorious Yet Neglected Case, 1850-1914", A. Wright & R. Shackleton (eds), *Worlds of Labour. Essays in Birmingham Labour History,* 1983.

B. Hill, "Women, Work and the Census: A Problem for Historians of Women", *History Workshop,* 35, 1993.

A. Hoffman, "Reliability & Validity in Oral History", D.K. Dunaway & W.K. Baum (eds), *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology,* Alta Mira Press, 1996.

C. Holmes, *A Tolerant Country? Immigrants, Refugees and Minorities in Britain.* Faber & Faber, 1991.

C. Holmes, "Historians and Immigration", C.G. Pooley and I.D. Whyte (eds),1991.

C. Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigrants and Society 1871-1971,* Macmillan, 1988.

C. Holmes, (ed), *Immigrants & Minorities in Britain,* Allen & Unwin, 1978.

E. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Manufacturing Town. Birmingham and the Industrial Revolution,* Sutton, 1998.
E. Hopkins, *Childhood Transformed: Working-Class Children in Nineteenth Century England,* Manchester University Press, 1994.
E. Hopkins, *Birmingham, The First Manufacturing Town in the World, 1760-1840,* Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989.
E. Hopkins, "Working hours & Conditions during the Industrial Revolution. A Reappraisal", *Economic History Review*, Vol. 35, 1982.
D. Hopwood & M. Dilloway, *Bella Brum: A History of Birmingham's Italian Community,* Birmingham,1996.
D. Hopwood, "Cornets & Courtyards: A Hundred Years of Italian Settlement in Birmingham", *Midland Historian,* Oct.1996.
A.C. Hughes, *The Italian Community in South Wales, 1870-1945,* M.A. Dissertation, Cardiff University, 1988.
A.C. Hughes, *Lime, Lemon & Sarsparilla: The Italian Community in S. Wales, 1881-1845,* Siren Books,1991.
E.H. Hunt, *British Labour History,* Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1981.
C.Jones, *Immigration and Social Policy in Britain,* Tavistock, 1977.
J. Kelly, "Family and Society", *Women, History and Theory,* University of Chicago Press, 1984.
A.J. Kershen, (ed), *The Promised Land? The Migrant Experience in a Capital City,* Avebury, 1997.
D.I. Kertzer, D.P. Hogan & N. Karweit, "Kinship: Italy Nineteenth Century Italian Town Kinties and Households", *Continuity & Change,* 7, 1992.
R. King & L. Zolli, "Italians in Leicester", *ATI,* Vol. 29, 1979.
R. King, "Italians in Britain: An Idiosyncratic Immigration", *ATI,* Vol. 29, 1979.
R. King, "Italian Migration to Great Britain", *Geography,* Vol. 62, 1977.
R. Krausz, *Ethnic Minorities in Britain,* Paladin, 1972.
F. Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens,* Penguin,1940.
P. Leoni, *I Shall Die on the Carpet,* London, 1966.
K. Lunn, "Immigrants and British Labour's Response, 1870-1950", *History Today,* Vol. 35, 1985.
M. Maynard & J. Purvis (eds), *New Frontiers in Women's Studies: Knowledge, Identity & Nationalism,* Taylor & Francis,1996.
A. Miles & D. Vincent (eds), *Building European Society. Occupational Change & Social Mobility in Europe, 1840-1940,* Manchester University Press,1993.
V. Yans McLaughlin, "Patterns of Work & Family Organisation: Buffalo's Italians", T.K. Rabb & R.I. Rothberg (eds), *The Family in History,* Harper Press, 1971.
A. O'Day, "Anti-Irish Behaviour", P. Panayi (ed),1996.
P.Panayi, "the historiography of immigrants and ethnic minorities: Britain compared with the USA", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* , Vol. 19, 1996.
P. Panayi, (ed), *Racial Violence in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,* London University Press, 1996.
P. Panayi, *Immigration, Ethnicity & Racism in Britain,* 1815-1945, Manchester University Press, 1994.
P. Panayi, "Germans in Nineteenth Century Britain", *History Today,* Vol 43, 1993.
R. Palmer, *The Britalians: An Anthropological Investigation,* D.Phil. Sussex University Press, 1981.

R. Palmer, "The Italians: Patterns of Migration to London", J. Watson (ed), 1977.
G. Pearson, *Hooligan. A History of Respectable Fears,* Macmillan, 1991.
B.S. Phillips, *Sociology: Social Structure and Change,* Macmillan, 1969.
E. Pleck, "A Mother's Wages: Income Earning among Married Italian & Black Women, 1896-1911", M. Gordon (ed), *The American Family in Social Historical Perspective,* St. Martin's Press, 1978.
J.K. Puar, "Revisiting Discources of "Asianness" and "Whiteness". Second Generation Sikh Women and Constructions of Identity", M.Maynard and J. Purvis (eds),1996.
C.G. Pooley & I.D. Whyte (eds) *Migrants, Emigrants and Immigrants; A Social History of Migration,* Routledge,1991.
A. Rae, *Manchester's Little Italy,* Richardson,1988.
V. Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History,* Sage,1984.
J. Rex & J. Mason (eds), *Theories of Ethnic Relations,* Cambridge University Press, 1986.
B. Reynolds, *Casalattico and the Italian Community in Ireland.* UCD Foundation for Italian Studies, 1993.
E. Roberts, *A Woman's Place. An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890-1940,* Blackwell, 1984.
R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum,* Penguin, 1973.
T.W. Roche, *Key In the Lock,* Murray, 1969.
S.O. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender & Class in Nineteenth Century England,* University of California Press, 1992.
S.O. Rose, "Sex, Class & Industrial Capitalism", *History Workshop,* Vol. 21, 1986.
E. Ross, "Survival Neworks: Women's Neighbourhood Sharing in London Before World War One", *History Workshop Journal,* 1983.
E. Salvoni, *Elana: A Life in Soho,* London, 1990.
G. Scott, *The Roman Catholics,* Hutchinson, 1967.
B. Sereni, *They Took The High Road,* Barga, 1974.
G.R. Searle, "Eugenics and Politics in Britain, 1900-14", *Science in History,*3, Noordhoff Publishers, 1976.
H. Shankland, "Italians in Newcastle, 1800-1900: The Records of St. Andrew's R.C. Church", *Northern Catholic History,* Vol. 36, 1995.
I. Silone, *Fontamara,* Redwords, 1994.
A. Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger,* Pluto Press, 1982.
A. D. Smith, *National Identity,* Penguin,1991.
J. E. Smith, *Family Connections: A History of Italian and Jewish Immigrants Lives in Providence, Rhode Island, 1900-1940,* University of New York Press,1985.
J. Solomos, B. Bindlay, S. Jones & P. Gilroy, *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in Britain,* Hutchinson, 1982.
L. Sponza, *Italian Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Realities and Images,* Leicester University Press, 1988.
C. Steedman, *The Tidy House,* Virago, 1982.
S. Steinburg, *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity & Class in America,* New York, 1981.
J. Stevenson, *Social History of Britain. British Society, 1914-1945,* Penguin, 1990.
G.D. Suttles, *The Social Order of the Slum,* London, 1968.

R. Swift & S. Gilley (eds), *The Irish in Victorian Britain: The local dimension*, Four Courts Press, 1999.
R. Swift, *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1914: Perspectives & Sources*, London,1990.
R. Swift & S. Gilley (eds), *The Irish In Britain, 1815-1939*, Pinter,1989.
G. Talese, *Unto The Sons*, Arrow Press,1992.
M. Tebbutt, *Making Ends Meets. Pawnbroking & Working-Class Credit*, New York, 1983.
S. Thapar-Bjorkert, "Nationalist memories: Interviewing middle-class nationalist women", *Oral History*, Vol 27, No 2. 1999.
F.M.L. Thompson, "The Rise of Suburbia", R.J. Morris & R. R, Rodger (eds), *The Victorian City, 1820-1914*, Longman, 1993.
F.M.L. Thompson, "Regions and Communities", *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950*, Vol 1, Cambridge University Press, 1990.
F.M.L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society, 1830-1900*, Fontana, 1988.
P. Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society*, Routledge,1992.
P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, Oxford University Press, 1988.
P. Tullio, *North of Naples, South of Rome*, Lilliput Press, 1994.
N. Tomes, "A Torrent of Abuse: Crimes of Violence Between Working-Class Men & Women", *Journal of Social History*, Vol.11, 1978.
J. Tunstall, *Newspaper Power. The New National Press in Britain*, Oxford University Press, 1996.
C.A. Vince, *The History of the Corporation of Birmingham*, Vols. 2 & 3, 1923.
J.K. Walton, *Fish & Chips & the British Working Class*, London University Press, 1991.
J. Walvin, *Leisure in Britain, 1780-1939*, Manchester University Press, 1983.
J. Walvin, *A Child's World: A Social History of English Childhood, 1800-1914*, Penguin, 1982.
J.L. Watson, *Between Two Cultures: Immigrants & Minorities in Britain*, Blackwell, 1977.
H. Wells, *Index of Birmingham Bye-Laws, 1864-1932*, Birmingham,1932.
P. Weinrich, "The Operationalisation of Identity Theory in Racial and Ethnic Relations", J. Rex & D. Mason (eds), 1994.
P. Weinrich, "Cross Ethnic Identification & Self-Rejection in a Black Adolescent", G.J. Verma & C. Bayley (eds), *Race, Education & Identity*, London University Press, 1979.
M.C.W. Wicks, *The Italian Exiles in London, 1816-1848*, Manchester University Press, 1937.
A. Wilkins, "Origins and Destinations of the Early Italio-Scots", *ATI*, Vol 29,1979.
R.A. Williams, (Jnr), "Competing Models of Multi-ethnic & Multi-cultural Societies: An Appraisal of Possibilities", J.M. Yinger and S.J. Cutler (eds), *Major Sociological Issues. A Multi-disciplinary View*, London,1978.
S. Wood, *Italian Women's Writing*, Athlone,1995.
D. Woods, "Community Violence", J. Benson (ed), 1984.
J.M. Yinger, "Intersecting Strands in the Theorisation of Race and Ethnic Relations", J. Rex and D. Mason, (eds), 1994.
M. Young & P. Wilmott, *Family and Kinship in East London*, Penguin,1962.
J.E. Zucci, *The Little Slaves of the Harp*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991.
K. Ziesler, *The Irish in Birmingham, 1830-1970*, Ph.D, Birmingham, University,1989.